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"BY THE TIME I SEE YOU AGAIN, YOU WILL BE GROWN A YOUNG LADY; MIND YOU LOVE ME THEN AS NOW."

Alone in the World; or, The Young Man's Ward.

By the author of "Clifton," "Pride and Passion," etc.

CHAPTER I.

PARADISE SQUARE.

WE lived in Paradise Square—Nan Briggs and I. Everybody knows where that is now, thanks to the kind offices and good works of the

men who, several years ago, took their charity into its degraded precincts.

But at the time of which I write, few ever ventured into those gloomy haunts, except the utterly degraded, the starving and altogether wretched, who had been dragged lower and lower into vice and infamy, and finally landed in Paradise Square. I am not about to enter into any description of its appearance, or of its miserable inhabitants—God knows I have not any desire to call up more memories of that time than are absolutely needful to my story.

It is enough to know that when fate flung me there, the "Old Brew

ery" flourished as in its most iniquitous days—riot and murder walked openly there—hunger and crime fought for dominion over the lost souls gathered within it, and there were no good angels to fight upon the other side.

In the darkest corner, and in one of the most miserable rooms of all the dark dens in the straggling row of decayed houses, dwelt old Nan Briggs and I.

She was not my mother—thank heaven for that! She had no claim upon me nor I on her. My mother died in her room, and Nan had kept me with her from that time; perhaps to further ends of her own—possibly from one of those undefined impulses of humanity which sometimes actuate the most hardened and degraded.

Who I am, I really never knew—I never shall. When drink had made Nan good-natured, she used to tell me that my mother was a "real lady;" but want and misery, perhaps sin, I cannot tell, had brought her down to Paradise Square to die. There she did die, and old Nan kept her for the sake of a few valuables—a gold cross and ring, a broken ornament or two, which still remained to her—relics of a time gone by, of which during her last hours, she raved brokenly, but without throwing any light upon her history.

I can remember when she died. I remember many things she taught me, although I was but a little child. During her illness I learned to read out of an old book that appertained to Nan, who pronounced "I arnin' a fine thing," and prophesied that one day I should be a grand lady.

My poor mother died at last, though, in her cross humors, Nan used to tell her it took her a great while, and they buried her—where I do not know—ask the city council where paupers are put. My mother found rest at length, and whatever her sins may have been I have no fear to leave her in the hands of Him "whose judgment is not as the judgment of men."

For a year after her death—at least I think it must have been about that time, although I had no means or knowledge of keeping count—I swept the street-crossings. All day I wielded my broom on busy old Broadway, watching the splendid carriages go by, and the magnificently dressed ladies—who never would see me, however urgent I might be—saunter past; peering in at the great windows of the shops; sharpening my hunger by staring at all manner of delicacies in the confectioners' casements; forgetting my chilled limbs by marveling at the beautiful sights on every side, or trotting up and down the pavement to keep the blood from freezing in my shrunken veins.

When night came, I carried home to Nan my day's earnings. Sometimes they consisted only of a few pennies; but occasionally a tiny bit of silver gleamed out among the coin, and when the old woman saw that, she would clutch it with a terrible specter of a laugh, praising me as a bright, honest girl. Sometimes I was so unfortunate as to receive nothing, or my little store would be wrested from me by some sister sweeper, stronger and wicked than I, and under such circumstances Nan used to beat me; but I do not remember that I cared much for it—indeed, the most brutal treatment would have been preferable to the loathsome caresses she occasionally bestowed upon me in her fits of maudlin intoxication.

She was terribly filthy; so, I suppose, was I; but I thought very little about those things. One duty Nan would insist upon, but it was because it was for her own benefit. My hair was very long and singularly black; she made me smooth it carefully every morning with an old brush she had by some means become possessed of, and which had once evidently been devoted to household purposes, and leave the tresses to stream down my shoulders, hanging far below my waist in a waveless, heavy mass. I believe Nan and I occasionally battled over that interesting ceremony; for my superabundant locks were a source of great annoyance to me, inasmuch as certain other young Bohemians were accustomed to pull them unmercifully, and the newsboys had an aggravating way of shouting, "there goes wild Madge," whenever I passed with my black hair streaming out in the wind. But my singular appearance gained me many extra coppers, as Nan well knew—and Nan was very acute where her interests were concerned—therefore I was not permitted in any way to change it.

So I swept the crossings day after day, while my long hair grew longer, and I waxed thin and tall, till I must have been twelve years old, or somewhere about that age. I do not suppose that I was any better than the degraded children around me; but I recollect that no fear of a beating would induce me to tell a lie or commit a theft, though Nan often warned me that if I did not learn "to prig," I might expect a terrible punishment.

I had nothing to do with the little imps of my own age; I hated them, and they returned the sentiment with interest, taking their revenge by shouting names as I passed, and flinging mud at me, and assailing me in every way that their miserable fancies could suggest; but sometimes old Nan would sally out from some unexpected corner where she had lain in wait, and scatter my foes to the right and left, giving me a final cuff as she drove me into the house, by the way of teaching me to avoid quarrels in future.

After all, I have to thank old Nan—in her way she cared for me as well as she was able. She was hardly human, either in mind or body—a mass of ignorance and uncleanness—but I do believe that somewhere in her anatomy she had once possessed certain womanly impulses, dwarfed, crushed, and altogether blighted during her long, sinful life.

But a change awaited me in the midst of that want and wretchedness, though I suppose I had no

warning of its approach—it is people of a higher grade than street-sweepers who can afford or understand the luxury of presentiments. But a change was at hand, and this was the way in which it came to me:

I was one morning standing at the corner of Broadway and one of the cross-streets, watching the busy crowd that swept heedlessly past like the varied shapes of a phantasmagoria, when a young man reined his horse up to the curbstone where I stood, and, dismounting, flung the bridle to a ragged boy and entered a shop near. I stood looking at the noble animal as he champed his bit impatiently, tossed his proud head and scattered the specks of foam over the torn coat of the urchin who held him. Several moments passed, and I, careless of everything else in my delight at the impatient movements and restless spirit of the horse, remained motionless on the curbstone until his rider again appeared.

He hurried by, of course, without noticing me; but my eyes fastened themselves upon his face with an interest and degree of observation which would have impressed those features upon my memory for years—even in that depth of ignorance in which all my faculties were locked, I had a wild admiration for everything beautiful that crossed my path.

He was still a mere youth; but his frame was so slender and lithe, his face so full of pride and boyish grace, his garments so tasteful and rich, that if I had ever heard of kings, I should immediately have decided that he must be one.

The chill wind swept through my thin garments, blowing my hair about my face; but I was unmindful of the cold, and stood watching him as he took the bridle from the boy's hand, and flung him a piece of silver as his reward.

He laid his hand upon the glossy neck of the horse, put one foot into the stirrup, and was just giving a vigorous spring which should place him in his seat when a loaded omnibus drew up suddenly in front. The horse started, gave a quick plunge, and would have thrown the youth under his feet had I not sprung forward and caught the bridle in my hand, holding it firmly in spite of the animal's struggles, until the rider could extricate himself.

I was unconscious that I had done anything worthy of praise, and was greatly surprised at the encomiums which all around bestowed upon the act. I heeded no one else, however, when he turned toward me with his quick, flashing glance.

"My brave girl!" he exclaimed, his haughty face softening into a smile so bright and beautiful that it seemed to bring all the charm of early boyhood back to his features; but he was very pale, and his right arm hung motionless at his side. "Here is some money," he continued, in a fainter tone; "take it; I can't stop, for I find that I have sprained my wrist—had it not been for you I might have been killed outright."

"I don't want the money," I replied, quite grieved that he should have offered it to me. "Old Nan can't beat me for not having taken it, because she won't know I could have earned so much."

For the first time he really looked at me, and with a glance of astonishment either at my singular appearance, or my unexpected refusal of the money.

I must have been a strange-looking child. My complexion was dark, sallow from unwholesome food and ill health; my eyes of a deep blue, appearing unnaturally large from the attenuation of my features, and the contrast with my long, black hair that floated loose over my neck and tattered cloak.

"Who is old Nan?" he asked, suddenly.

The question surprised me! Everybody in our alley knew Nan Briggs, and most people feared her. It never occurred to me that the rest of the world could be ignorant of her existence.

"You don't know Nan?" I said, wonderingly; "why, I have lived with her for ever so long."

"Very possible," he replied, with a light laugh, "but I never had the honor of hearing her name before. Is she your mother?"

I shook my head, and tears came into my eyes; I never could think of my lost parent without crying.

"My mother was a lady," I said, indignantly, for I had always prided myself upon the fact of which Nan had informed me, and held myself better than my fellow-beggars in consequence—"but she died a great while ago."

"Have you any friends?"

"I've nobody but old Nan; she whips me sometimes—but I don't mind that—she says it's good for children."

He muttered something to himself, and his countenance changed.

"I cannot stay now," he said. "Come here to-morrow, you little wild Indian—if I am not here, come again."

He attempted to mount his horse, but grew very white, and leaned against a lamp-post for support.

"Halloa, Amory!" exclaimed a young man several years older, halting opposite; "what the deuce is to pay here?"

"I have hurt my wrist confoundedly," he replied. "Suppose you ride my horse home and I will get into an omnibus; I feel very weak."

His friend complied, and I had a consciousness, by the way, that the youth turned from me as if he did not wish the other to observe that he had been conversing with me. I did not marvel thereat—I do not now—I have learned that it requires great courage to brave the world's sneer!

"Remember what I told you, children," he said, turning toward me again after the horse and its rider had disappeared. "You are an odd figure, I must say—how comes such a looking bird with those feathers?"

He hailed an omnibus, and, with a parting glance, as if to remind me of his command, entered it and was driven rapidly from my sight.

CHAPTER II.

A GREAT CHANGE.

No more, that day, did I sweep the crossings. I walked down the crowded thoroughfare completely oblivious to everything around. Several times I brushed against ladies, who pulled their rich garments away with harsh words, as if there had been fear of contagion in my very touch. At last I sat down upon the stone steps which lead to St. Paul's stately church, and the afternoon had worn away before I stirred.

What my thoughts were I cannot tell—a strange jumble, doubtless; I know I often had such as perplexed me sorely.

I went home that night with no money; and Nan's good humor was not increased when she learned what a sum I might have earned. I was, of course, too wise to have told her, but she heard the circumstances from an old ragman who, unseen by me, had witnessed the whole proceeding. It is very probable that I might have had another beating to record, had not her anger been appeased by my telling her that I was to meet the gentleman on the following day.

I was only dispatched to bed without having received my accustomed crust; but I soon forgot hunger and cold in recalling the wonderful event of the day, and looking eagerly forward to the morrow.

I had no project—no idea of what might happen, as a less ignorant child would have had; to me, even the thought of again seeing and speaking with any human being so elegant and marvelous as that youth, was dream enough.

Famine and cold had often kept me awake, but never so long as did those vague fancies which followed me into my dreams, and lent them a beauty they had never known before—as far removed from the dull misery of my existence as would have been some wonderful Eastern tale.

The next morning I was stationed on the corner long before the appointed hour; but I waited in vain—the stranger did not appear. I was going away quite overcome with grief, when some one touched my arm.

"What do you want?" I asked, sullenly.

"Do you live with old Nan?" questioned the voice.

I turned quickly and saw an elderly man in a livery—I learned afterward it was so called—standing beside me.

"Yes, I live with her," I replied; "and I caught the gentleman's horse," I added, for it occurred to my mind that he had been sent in search of me.

"You're the very one I want then," he continued; "Master Easton couldn't come out, so he must needs send me, and a nice errand it is, I don't think! You are just to follow me, you young blackamoor—at a respectful distance, mind, though, for I don't care about being seen in this sort of company."

Without a word I obeyed him, careless of his rudeness, following in his footsteps a long distance up Broadway, until he went down the basement-steps of a large, magnificent house. He bade me stay in the hall, and went up-stairs.

In a few moments he returned and again ordered me to follow him. I ascended the stairs, passed through a broad hall, which looked more grand than my vague ideas of heaven, mounted another staircase, and entered a room in the upper story. I paid no attention to its splendor, for before me, on a low couch, lay the young stranger.

"So, here you are!" he exclaimed, throwing down a book he had been reading. "Well, we must make a change in your appearance before any one else sees you. Rollins," he continued to the man, "have somebody find her a dress. Tell them to wash her and make her tidy; then ask my aunt to come here."

The man bowed respectfully, darted a look of disgust at my appearance, took me out and consigned me to the hands of a wondering and indignant housemaid.

In an hour I was led back to that magnificent room neatly dressed, my face clean, my hair smooth and shining, but still falling in heavy masses about my waist. I shrunk back at the threshold, for a lady was sitting there, and near her stood a proud-looking girl, who surveyed me with unqualified disdain. The young gentleman bade me advance, and his voice reassured me.

The lady regarded me for an instant through her glass, then exclaimed:

"I don't wonder you were struck, Easton; upon my word, I believe she's a Gipsy. What is your name, little girl?"

"Madge Wylde," I answered, unawed by her manner, for I was not timid after the first moment of surprise.

"A very fit name," she said. "Would you like to live with me, and learn to read and sew?"

"And wait on me," put in the girl; "you said she should, mamma."

"Yes, yes, my dear," returned the lady quickly, for the youth on the sofa made a hasty movement; "that can be easily settled hereafter. Would you like to live here?" she added to me.

"If old Nan is willing," I replied; "but, if you don't pay her, she will get me away from you. Don't let her do that—oh, don't!"

"You need not be afraid," said the boy. "Be a good girl, and try to learn every thing you are bid, and old Nan shall never have you."

He whispered a few words to the lady, who replied aloud:

"You are such a willful creature—however, have

your own way! Indeed, I dare say we shall find the little thing quite useful. Louise," she continued to the girl, "arrange your cousin's cushions; he is not comfortable. I am grateful, Easton, that you escaped with a sprain and a slight lameness."

"We have to thank that little sprite for it," he said, smiling at me.

Quick as she had spoken, and before the lifeless-looking girl could obey her mother's command, I sprang forward and settled the pillows in a more comfortable position.

"I think you will find her sufficiently forward," was Miss Louise's comment; but her speech received no response and there was something in her cousin's eyes that checked any further display of temper.

"You must excuse Louise's petulance," said the lady, after an instant, catching his glance; "she does so love to do every thing for you herself—she is even jealous of me—I never saw any one so tender-hearted."

"I am very grateful to her," he replied, carelessly, and changing his position with a yawn. "How tiresome it is to be shut up in the house—this morning has seemed like a week!"

"But this child"—said the lady, as if suddenly returning to a consciousness of my presence. "Rollins must go with her to her home and pay the horrid creature she has lived with her price, and get her away. We leave town so soon that she can obtain no clew to our whereabouts, if she repents."

"I should not think she would be likely to do that," added the young girl.

The cousin glanced at her again.

"She looks like one of Murillo's pictures; her head is exquisitely shaped."

The girl darted a spiteful glance at me, and laughed outright, but her mother interposed between the two.

"She had better go back at once, had she not, Easton?"

"I think so, madam. I must tell Rollins to learn every thing he can about her."

"Oh, I've no doubt you will hear some wonderful romance," rejoined Louise; "perhaps she is an enchanted princess."

"She looks like one," replied her cousin, coolly; "such an out-of-the-way face—really it is quite refreshing to see something so picturesque and original."

The lady rose and rung the bell, as if anxious to put an end to the conversation. The man who had conducted me to the house appeared in answer to her summons, and was ordered to go with me to my old home for the purpose of bargaining with old Nan concerning my departure.

"Don't leave the child," said the youth. "Pay the old hag whatever she asks, so that there may be no more trouble about it."

The man promised implicit obedience, and took me down-stairs again to the housemaid, who put on me a pretty bonnet and shawl, and then we set forth.

Old Nan had no objection to parting with me, provided she was paid her price. Indeed, she generously gave me my mother's cross, a moment after demanding to be paid its full value, patted my head while she vowed that I might thank her and the bringing-up she had given me for my good fortune, and allowed me to depart.

Nan and I met no more. From that day my destiny took unto itself new paths, spreading out in a far different direction—whether for happiness or misery the future only could tell.

I returned to that stately mansion and its haughty occupants, almost stupefied by the suddenness and magnitude of the change which had come over me. Of course, I did not speculate as an older person would have done; but I was full of strange, wild thoughts, and among others would come recollections of my mother's death, and the dismal room where her life went out, intruding themselves upon me in the rich chamber where I sat, like beggars entering a festal hall.

I was startled at the grandeur around me; I thought there were many Madge Wyldes beside me as the mirrors reflected my image. The soft carpets seemed never meant to be trodden—every thing was so gorgeous and beautiful that I could not believe it real. But, young as I was, and dolefully ignorant, too, something told me that Louise was watching my amazement with scornful pleasure, and I carefully repressed it.

CHAPTER III.

MY NEW HOME.

THREE days after, we left the city, and for the first time in my life I enjoyed the delight of riding in a carriage. I went in the vehicle with Mrs. Amory, her daughter and nephew, although at first the lady had been at a loss where to put me. It was Easton's decision that settled the matter, as it appeared to decide every thing in which he chose to interest himself.

"You do not mean her to associate with the servants. She is to be brought up a companion for Louise—a sort of usefully useless ornament to your boudoir; therefore, keep her where she may learn good manners—though they seem natural enough to her."

So I went in the carriage with them. I can look back upon no season of such keen enjoyment as that in which I then reveled. I had never been in the country before, and our way led along that most majestic river of our New World, every step revealing some unexpected beauty and marvel, filling my eyes with tears and my heart with emotions painful from their very sweetness, until I leaned back in my seat sick, and faint with excitement.

I knew that we were going to Mrs. Amory's country-seat, where she intended to pass at least a por-

tion of the summer, and my poor, undeveloped soul panted with joy at the thought of spending whole months among the green trees and beautiful flowers. I was not noticed a great deal, though, when, several times, I clasped my hands and uttered some ejaculation of astonishment or admiration at the varied scenes presented to my gaze, Easton would look smilingly at me, and the languid lady, long past admiring any thing, would say:

"Is not her enthusiasm delicious?—so out-of-the-way and piquant."

Miss Louise occasionally indulged in a few words of contempt, or a little sneering laugh; but somehow her cousin always checked her vapid insolence or merriment, and I was allowed to indulge my excited feelings in any way I saw fit.

We rode all day; then the young lady chose to fancy herself ill, and we were obliged to spend the night at a little town whose name I do not remember. The next morning Amory proposed to his aunt that we should pursue our journey in the steamboat that touched there, and she at once consented.

I shall never forget my emotions as we drove down to the landing and went on board of the boat. Since then I have seen noble ships of every nation upon the broad ocean—have looked on all that is grand or lovely in our country—all that is famed or wonderful in the old world—but nothing ever awakened such feelings as I experienced when I felt myself gliding smoothly over the waters in that graceful boat.

Miss Louise gracefully gave me her bag and several books to hold, while, at her mother's request, her cousin offered her his arm for a promenade on deck. Mrs. Amory retired to the cabin, and I was left to gaze in silence on the beautiful views which every moment opened in a new loveliness before us.

How I longed to stand upon the summits of the mountains rising so blue and distinct in the distance—to let myself gently down among the foam-crested waters and float softly along after the white-winged birds skimming about us like shadows. Heaven appeared very near those lofty peaks; and all my life I had had such wild fancies of going thither in search of my lost mother.

The boat swept rapidly on, and in a few moments we reached the landing where we were to leave it. We again entered the carriage, passed swiftly through the little village and along the smooth road, until I saw the jutting wings and lofty chimneys of a large house upon our right hand.

It proved to be our place of destination; for, quitting the highway, we passed through the great iron gates, up a winding drive, bordered on either side with tall trees that interlaced their branches overhead, sometimes losing sight of the house and river altogether; then, upon reaching a sudden rise of ground, the gray roof would loom up again and the bright waters dance in the sunlight, while my heart leaped at the sight of them.

The house stood upon an eminence, built of dark-gray stone, with spreading wings and broad verandas, perfectly covered with fragrant vines just bursting into bloom.

A smooth, broad lawn swept from the steps down to the beginning of the avenue; on the right hand was an immense flower garden, while at the left and back a fine old wood, stately with primeval pines and hemlocks, spread down toward the river.

I could catch glimpses of the waters from the veranda, sweeping away in a succession of beautiful windings until a sudden curve and jutting cliff shut the last gleam from view, miles and miles above.

The interior of the dwelling was in keeping with its surroundings. A great hall divided it in the center, widening in the middle to an arched room, where a sparkling fountain threw up its spray, and fell with a sweet, ringing sound into a marble basin below. Glass doors, at the further end, gave egress to a lawn corresponding with the one in front, giving beautiful glimpses into the old woods, while near the entrance of the hall a vast marble pile rose in fanciful windings—I could hardly believe it to be a staircase.

There were many spacious apartments, crowded with all the luxuries that wealth could provide or a refined fancy suggest. Pictures lined the walls; beautiful statues, from which I shrunk as if they had been spirits, were grouped around; and wherever the eye turned, it fell upon objects of almost fairy-like loveliness. My course of life soon became settled.

I was regarded half as a pet, treated kindly, provided with pretty garments, taught such things as it was necessary I should learn, together with a few showy accomplishments; yet made all the while to feel that between me and my benefactor there was an immense gulf, over which I could never cross.

A portion of each day was spent in Mrs. Amory's dressing-room, sometimes following the bent of my own inclinations, looking at books of engravings, or playing childlike, as my fancy suggested; at others, subject to the caprice of Louise, who was at one moment kind and good-natured, the next so irritable and exacting that I could do nothing to please her.

She was completely spoiled by her mother's indulgence; accustomed to the gratification of every caprice, however extravagant and ridiculous it might be, so that it was not perhaps altogether her fault that she was growing proud, haughty and vain; for, under the best and most consistent government, she would always have been a weak, frivolous character.

Easton Amory remained several weeks at Woodbrook, then he left us quite unexpectedly. From him I always received kindness and attention; although, after a time, he ceased noticing me much

in his aunt's presence, as it was evidently unpleasant to her.

But very often I encountered him in the grounds; then he would sit down by me, and talk in his reckless, dashing way, apparently not regarding me as a child; and, indeed, though ignorant, and younger than Louise, I was, in many things, her superior—I felt it even then.

The governess, who I learned had been on a visit to her family, now returned, and she gave me lessons daily, when those of Louise were over; as she was a kind woman, and devoted herself assiduously to my improvement, I made a progress that was perfectly astonishing, and was soon quite the equal of Louise in all such studies at it was considered proper for me to pursue.

I was passionately fond of pictures, and, whenever I could steal into the gallery, where a fine collection hung, I spent hours in gazing upon them, weeping often, and talking to them as if they could understand my love and admiration.

I had received no instruction in drawing, but I used to sit for hours with a pencil and paper, making sketches, which, though rude and ill-formed, showed more than an ordinary degree of talent for one so young.

I was sitting in a window-seat, in the upper hall, one day, busily occupied with some marvelous production, when Easton chanced to pass.

"What on earth are you about?" he asked.

"Had it been any one else who made the demand, I should have hidden the sheet; but much as I loved him, I did not dare, for I was a perfect slave to his wishes; so I replied faintly:

"Nothing at all."

"Nothing at all," he replied; "you certainly have a very industrious way of working at nothing. Let me see what you are at—nonsense, child, don't be afraid!"

He took the paper from me with a manner he had even in the slightest act, which clearly showed how entirely he had been accustomed to have every one around submit to his least wish.

He looked at the drawing for a moment without speaking; claimed others which lay in my lap; glanced at those in the same unusual silence; while I sat watching him with anxious eyes, as if sentence of life or death hung upon his lips.

"Who taught you?" he asked, at length; "Miss Western, I suppose."

"Nobody taught me," I replied; "I only do them because I like to, oh, so much."

"Whew!" he exclaimed.

"Don't take them away from me," I said, "please don't—it doesn't do any harm, you know."

"I should think not, indeed—why you are a little live genius—I suppose you know what that is."

"Of course I do—I was reading about one the other day."

"And you are taking pattern after him?"

"I don't know what you mean—please give me my picture, Easton, I want to finish it before somebody calls me away to do something else."

At this moment Mrs. Amory came up-stairs. I made a movement to seize and hide my drawing, but Easton held it above my reach.

"Aunt," he said, "look at this."

She took the sketches with her usual stately deliberation, looked at them for a moment, and said complacently:

"Louise really draws very well; she has immense talent in every thing she undertakes. Did she give you these, Madge?"

"Louise!" exclaimed Easton, almost contemptuously. "Excuse me, ma'am, but she could not draw so well to save her soul."

"Who did them then?" she asked, in a tone which betrayed her rising displeasure. "They exhibit talent, to be sure, but Miss Western couldn't have drawn these crude things."

"There sits the artist," replied Easton, pointing to me, laughing a little bit, with a certain degree of exultation in his tone.

Mrs. Amory gave me an angry glance, while the color shot into her pale cheeks.

"Who gave you lessons?" she asked.

"No one, madam," I answered. "Please don't be angry—indeed, I didn't mean any harm."

She gave me the drawings without a word, and turned away, but Easton did not follow.

"My friend," said she, looking back, with one of her sweetest smiles, "I thought you promised to make some calls with Louise and me—have you forgotten?"

"By no means—I am quite ready. But we must have Miss Western teach this young sprite; she certainly exhibits great talent."

"Very well, it shall be attended to; but just now—"

"Ah, here is Miss Western," pursued Easton, heedless of his aunt's impatience, as the governess came down from the school-room. "Look at these drawings," he continued, placing them in her hand "you must take great pains with her—perhaps we have found an artist."

"Do you wish me to give Madge lessons in drawing, madam?" asked the governess, turning toward Mrs. Amory, with her accustomed composure.

"Of course, of course," replied Easton, before his aunt could speak; "that is what I am saying."

Mrs. Amory looked excessively annoyed; but there was something in Easton's face which she did not choose to contradict.

"I have no objections," she said coldly. "Madge, I do not like your choice of a seat; please remove yourself to the school-room—or no, you may go to my chamber, and wind the silk that lies on the table."

As Easton Amory handed his aunt down-stairs, I heard him laugh in a tantalizing way, and she re-

plied to it in a low, quick voice; but I did not catch the words. I knew there was something amiss, although I hardly understood what, for Miss Western was regarding me with the sad look she often bestowed upon my face.

"Oh, Miss Western," I exclaimed, impetuously, "isn't it nice! I want to begin right away—this very moment."

"You have the silk to wind first."

"That won't take any time at all, you know, and I want to begin so bad."

"Bring the skeins into the school-room," she replied, kindly; "as soon as you have wound them I will give you a first lesson."

"Oh, I am so glad! Let me kiss you, Miss Western, let me kiss you right off."

The governess bent down to receive my caress, and, standing up an instant, with her hand lightly placed on my head, she continued:

"Do not forget to be grateful to the kind friends among whom you have fallen—let it be your study to please them—and above all, thank God heartily for his goodness."

"I do," was my reply; "I pray for Easton and all of them every night."

"Mr. Easton," suggested the governess, gently.

"No," returned I sturdily, "he gave me leave to call him so only the other day."

"When you are a little older you will learn that it is not proper," she said.

"But I like it best."

"I think Mrs. Amory would not like it," she replied, "and you would be sorry to displease her."

I did not understand at all why it could offend Mrs. Amory, but I was too busy with my proposed studies to think much about the matter.

After that I received instruction daily, and before many months, Miss Western predicted wonderful things for me.

CHAPTER IV.

THE YOUNG STRANGER.

EASTON AMORY left Woodbrook soon after that little scene; and as, during several weeks following, the house was crowded with company, I was allowed to wander about at my pleasure.

I received lessons regularly from Miss Western, but Louise could hardly be induced to look at a book. Young as she was, a love for every species of dissipation was the strongest feeling in her nature. Her soul was not more than half formed; such faculties as she possessed would never be more than partially developed, but she loved flattery and excitement, and was never in good humor unless her mother permitted her to be dressed and among the visitors.

I was, of course, sent for but seldom. Occasionally, Louise would take it into her wise head to use her embroidery-frame, and would have me at hand to sort and wind silks; but that was from a desire to make me feel my dependence. I knew it would have pleased her had I revolted, and been coerced into obedience; so never, by word or look, did I betray how, child though I was, such servitude galled my proud spirit.

At other times, after my lessons were over, I devoted several hours to drawing; then Miss Western would insist on my leaving it; so I would take a book—choosing those fullest of pictures—wander off into the depths of the woods, and, seeking some favorite thicket, lie and lose myself in that delightful companionship, while the summer light flickered through the branches of the old trees, danced merrily upon the greensward, or lingered, like a blessing, upon my forehead, that ached from the strangeness and intensity of thoughts which I had no power to comprehend.

One day I had nearly reached the boundaries of the estate; for, on that side, Mrs. Amory's lands terminated with the woods. I had been annoyed by one of Louise's displays of temper, and, as soon as I could release myself, had hurried off into that lonely retreat.

I threw aside my bonnet, let my hair stream once more after its old untidy fashion, which was no longer permitted, and raced wildly up and down, scaring the rabbits from their retreat, and chasing the butterflies as they glanced past. I tired myself fairly out at length, and lay down upon the grass to rest, idly twisting my hair round and round my fingers, after a habit I had, and lazily watching the sunbeams kiss the tree-tops.

At last, a step sounded faintly on the green turf; but I did not look up, supposing it to be one of the men employed about the place.

"Really," said a voice I did not know, "I wonder if the grove is haunted? This is the first time in years that I have set my foot here, and I didn't expect to be treated to the sight of a wood-nymph."

I sprang to my feet at once, and stood looking at the speaker in astonishment, but without any fear.

He was a youth, apparently about the age of Easton Amory, but unlike him in every respect. He was rather pale than fair, with large, gray eyes, a mouth that spoke mingled sweetness and determination, and soft, wavy brown hair, of that peculiar golden hue so seldom seen, but which is so beautiful. I have seen such hair but once since; then it adorned the forehead of genius. The face was not handsome until he smiled; then it lit up so brightly, and his great eyes were so soft and varied in their expression, that it lent his features something nobler than mere beauty.

"You need not look at me with so much wonder," he said, "nor be at all afraid."

"Afraid!" repeated I, with a considerable show of contempt in my tone; "why should I be?"

He laughed a little, in a subdued sort, and stooped to pat a beautiful black and tan dog, that lay at his feet, panting with the fatigue of a sharp run. From his manner I suppose he thought me older than I

really was, for I was tall and slender, and my hair a woman might have envied.

"I thought at first you were my cousin Louise," he continued; "but when I saw you running like a deer, I knew you could not be; she is altogether too languid and fine for such exertion."

"Your cousin Louise?" I returned, staring at him in new astonishment. "How comes she to be your cousin?"

"Very easily; but did you never hear me spoken of?" he continued, with much earnestness. "Indeed, I am astonished at my aunt's neglect. I wish she could see me here this moment—what a way she would be in!"

"Who are you?" I asked, abruptly, quite losing sight of the principles of courtesy, which Miss Western so diligently instilled into my mind, in my wonder at his sudden appearance and singular words.

"You speak like the lady of the manor," said he, laughing at the air I had unconsciously assumed; then, taking off his cap, he made me a low bow, and added: "Be it known to you, worshipful maiden, that I am your unworthy servant, Walter Stuart."

"And you are Louise's cousin?"

"I have that honor; and add thereto that of being nephew to her serene mother, whom I conclude you are visiting."

"No," I replied, not caring how quickly any one learned my real position; "I live with her—she took me away from old Nan Briggs, and I have been here ever since."

The smile faded from his lips, and a graver expression stole over his face; somehow, young as he was, it seemed more natural to it than the merry look it had worn a moment before.

"Better have left you with old Nan!" he muttered. "How came she to find you?"

"I saved Easton from falling off his horse, so he persuaded his aunt to take me," I said.

"Hum!" was his doubtful rejoinder. "I remember hearing that my delectable cousin had met with an accident."

"Is he your cousin, too?" I asked.

"We have the happiness to hold that relationship to each other," he replied. "Do you think him handsome?" he asked quickly.

"Yes; much handsomer than you," I replied, angrily, so irritated by his tone that I grew hot and red.

"We won't quarrel about looks, Miss. What shall I call you?"

"My name is Madge Wyld."

"A very appropriate one! They did not give you the name also, I conclude."

"Certainly not. I suppose I may have a name as well as other people."

"I should be sorry to prevent you," he replied, with the same mock respect, which left me undecided whether to be vexed or to laugh. I sensibly decided upon the latter, and as he joined in my mirth, we soon became excellent friends, falling into a long and interesting conversation upon a variety of topics.

"Do you live near here?" I asked, at length.

"The next place to this; those are our grounds upon the other side of the wall."

"Why do you ever visit your aunt?" I questioned, boldly.

"It does seem strange that I should live so near such charming relatives, and never see them," he returned, in his old bantering tone.

"Why do you?" I persisted.

"Because I don't wish to," he answered, bluntly;

"Nor would they thank me for my visit, if I made one. Indeed, I suppose if Mrs. Amory could see me here this moment, she would order the dogs set upon me."

"What have you done?" I asked, looking suspiciously at him.

"So it follows that the fault must be mine, does it?" he asked.

"Was it?" I persisted, with all the earnestness of my age.

"Nothing at all; I have not exchanged a word with any of them since I was a little child."

"Then you can't have any quarrel with them," I argued.

"I am afraid you are not very worldly wise, Miss Madge," he said, smiling. "I cannot explain the affair to you, although you do demand it in such an imperious way. Mrs. Amory and we have not been friends for years. Unless you wish to have your ears soundly boxed, I would not advise you to mention my name."

The conversation passed to other themes, and, as was natural at my age, very soon became as confidential as possible.

"Do you come here often?" he asked.

"Almost every day, when it is pleasant. I like to be in the woods, don't you?"

"Indeed I do. I fairly live in our part of this old forest. Come with me, and I will show you my work. We must often have been neighbors without being aware of it."

I followed him to the low wall that separated the grounds, and sprang over after him, before he could make a movement to assist me.

"Upon my word," he said, "you can jump like a deer."

"Louise says it isn't ladylike," I said, blushing a little, for I was a sensitive child, in spite of my wild spirits.

"Never mind her; it would be a good thing for her to run about a little, and get some color in her wax-doll face."

"She says it is aristocratic to be pale."

"With all my heart; and she shall be as aristocratic as she likes, only do not let her make you so."

"She is not likely to try it," I replied. "But where is your favorite place?"

"Very near here. Come this way."

We took a winding path through the woods, and soon came to a rustic summer-house, covered with blossoming vines and overhung by the great trees.

"What a pretty place," I said.

He conducted me into the arbor. There were low seats covered with moss—a fantastic table of the same rustic manufacture as the summer-house—books and papers were scattered about, all making up the most charming retreat possible to imagine.

"Do you like it?" he asked.

"Oh, it is beautiful! There is nothing like this in our woods. I wish there was—such a pretty place to sit and read."

"I hope you will come here very often, then, and bring your books," he answered.

"Oh, may I?"

"Of course you may, you little fairy."

"Then I will. You will see me almost every pleasant day."

"Very well; I am sure that I cannot see you too often."

"And you live so near here?" I asked.

"Yes; you can see the house through the trees."

"But why don't you ever come to visit your aunt?"

"Because we are deadly enemies."

"How can that be?" I said, wonderingly. "Relatives are never enemies."

"Are they not?" he returned, laughing scornfully. "I think they are very seldom any thing else."

"But it isn't right," I expostulated.

"Nor is it my fault, little Madge. But don't talk about them; I never wish even to think of their names. I would not have set foot in those grounds, but Brownie, my dog here, ran away, and I heard her moaning so piteously that I thought she must be hurt, and came after her without thinking where I was."

"What a pretty dog she is," I said. "I found one last week, a nice little thing, and Mrs. Amory told me that I might keep it, but Louise pretended that she was afraid of the poor doggie, and screamed so every time it came near her, that they made me send it away."

"Horrid little wretch!" he murmured. "Never mind, Madge, you shall come here and play with Brownie whenever you please; see, she has taken a fancy to you already, and Brownie seldom does to strangers. She pays you a high compliment."

The little creature had leaped into my lap, and, licking my hands for a time, curled herself comfortably up, and went fast to sleep.

"And you come here often?" I inquired.

"Oh, yes; I study here; you will always find me when the weather is fine. Do you like picture books, Madge?"

I was insane about them, and when he put a volume of colored engravings in my hand, the measure of my delight was full. He talked very kindly to me, evinced an interest in my childish conversation, and explained the pictures to me, until I came to the conclusion that he must be very learned indeed—almost as wise as Easton; of course, no one could quite equal him in my mind.

We stayed there until late in the afternoon. I had entirely forgotten that I might be wanted in the house.

"I must go home, now," I said, when I remembered how long I had been gone. "Miss Western will scold me if I don't."

"Who is she?"

"The governess, you know."

"I did not; is she nice?"

"Oh, very nice; I love her so much."

"Well, if she is kind to you, all right."

"I will lay Brownie on the moss," I said; "she will sleep there as nice as possible. Good-by, now, Walter Stuart; what a pretty name you have got."

"Thank you, Madge; good-by. I shall expect you very soon again."

"May I come to-morrow?"

"The sooner the better. If I am busy, you can amuse yourself with a book."

"Oh, I won't disturb you; I'll be as still as a mouse."

"So be it! To-morrow then, little fairy."

"Yes, I'll come to-morrow," and away I bounded, quite delighted with my new friend.

CHAPTER V.

MIDSUMMER HAPPINESS.

SEVERAL days passed without my again seeing Walter Stuart, for I was kept so busy in the house that I found no time for my accustomed rambles in the woods. Louise detained me, constantly waiting upon her—she had a slight illness, which she magnified, as she always did her ailments, into sickness, and I was kept near to gratify her whims.

I think Louise disliked me because I so far surpassed her in natural quickness, and, like all mean natures, she never omitted an opportunity of gratifying her malicious disposition.

Among other trials, I was doomed to complete a piece of worsted-work that she had begun—a many-colored dog, holding a basket of flowers in his mouth, of hues and shades that would have astonished Flora could she have seen them. The girl took delight in watching me and finding fault with my progress, forcing me to pick out the stitches a dozen times in succession, though, on each separate trial, they had been set exactly as she directed.

Passionate and fiery I was, but I had early learned that nothing vexed Louise so much as to see me perfectly unmoved by her taunts; so I heeded her ill-humor not at all, singing gayly at my work, and

looking quite happy and unconcerned, though, all the while, I was ready to spring out of the window with restlessness and impatience.

Her blue eyes would fairly blaze, and her delicate complexion grow purple with passion, and several times she struck me with her whole force, calling me by every insulting name that her mean imagination could suggest.

So the weeks passed, and the beautiful midsummer came on. Woodbrook put on all its beauties, and to me the place was like Paradise.

I missed Easton exceedingly, and his absence was a source of great grief to me: but I never mentioned his name, though night after night I lay in bed crying with a sort of vague unrest, and whenever I could gain access to the picture-gallery unperceived, spending hours before his portrait—talking to it, asking counsel of it, calling it my best, my only friend.

When the clustering vines were most fragrant, the flower-gardens in their richest beauty, the depths of the great wood greenest and most lovely, Mrs. Amory was seized with a sudden fever to depart. I heard her speak of a trip to Saratoga, and learned from Miss Western what and where it was, watching with silent wonder the preparations that went on, and marveling how she could tear herself from that beautiful spot.

Louise was to accompany her, and I feared I should be compelled to go; but certain that the ill-natured girl would force me to act contrary to my desires, I occasionally whispered in her ear of the happiness she would enjoy, and left her to infer, if she pleased, that I envied her anticipated pleasure. So Louise decided that I should remain where I was, although, once or twice, Mrs. Amory spoke of taking me.

"I won't have her!" said her daughter; "indeed I won't! People will be asking if she is any relation of mine—though, to be sure, we might dress her in a Turkish costume, and they would take her for a mulatto—she is black enough, in all conscience!"

I made no reply, although I was furious. I did not hate the miserable creature; I felt too strongly her immeasurable inferiority, and despised her taunts as much as the weak spirit that instigated them.

So they went away, and Miss Western went to visit her relatives—I was alone, with the exception of the servants. But Mrs. Amory saw fit to impose certain restrictions upon me; she had never quite forgotten her annoyance about the drawings. She decided, properly enough, that I must be taught to sew, and the housekeeper was instructed, during certain hours of each day, to induct me into the mysteries of needlework.

I was perfectly happy during the month that followed. I attended to my sewing every morning, and the rest of the day was at my own disposal; I could read, study, and, better than all, draw as constantly as I saw fit. I know that I improved very rapidly; and I was so anxious that Easton should be pleased with my success when he returned.

During those weeks I frequently saw Walter Stuart. When I sought my old haunt in the woods, he would come to the division wall that separated Woodbrook from his home, and call my name. I always gladly obeyed his invitation to visit the summer-house, for I liked him, although I should no more have thought of comparing him with Easton Amory than earth with heaven. He was kind, gentle, pleasant; but, in my mind, Easton was something so superior to any other human being, that it would have been sacrilege to my faith to have compared the two.

"I'll wager my head that Mademoiselle Louise set you at that work," said he, as we sat, one day, in the arbor—he with a book, from which he had been reading to me, and I occupied in embroidering a handkerchief.

"You are quite mistaken," I replied, haughtily; "I am doing it because I wish to; it is for Miss Western."

He laughed mischievously at my irritation, flung his book aside, and began playfully teasing the little dog that lay at his feet.

"When is Easton Amory coming back?" was the next question.

"Not at all this summer, Miss Western told me. He will return to college in the fall."

"So shall I, Miss Madge. I don't think he will be hurt with the preparation he makes; he is off on a yachting excursion with a party of Southerners."

"I should imagine," I replied, "that he would need very little preparation to do any thing he wished."

Walter Stuart smiled—his old, pained smile. I went on with my work, and he looked at me for a long time, then turned away, drawing a deep breath.

"Poor Madge!" he murmured, pityingly. "Poor little Madge!"

"Don't!" I said, while the tears rose to my eyes; "my mother used to say that—it makes me cry."

He stroked my hair softly, as a brother might have done, and his voice took its sweetest tone as he said:

"I wish you knew my mother; I wish you lived with her."

"Where is she?" I inquired.

"Gone to visit a sick relative; she left, unexpectedly, the day after I first saw you. I would not go up, for I had my studies to look after; so I am alone in my castle, monarch of all I survey."

"You must be very rich," I said, "if you own this place; and the house, though not so large as ours, is quite as handsome."

A quick flush shot over his face—his eyes flashed, then grew misty. He rose from the ground, and took two or three impatient turns across the shorn turf in front of the summer-house.

"Some time," he said, at length, coming back to my side, "I will tell you a long story; you are too young now to hear it."

"Is it a very sad one?" I asked.

"I do not know; rather sad for me, on some accounts, yet my mother says that, in the end, the very means employed to thwart my destiny may work me much good."

"I don't see how."

"That is because you do not know the story. But I must not stay here any longer, Madge. I do not suppose I shall come again for a great while. I am going away."

"Where?" I asked, somewhat sorry, yet not much grieved, except that he spoke mournfully.

"I have business away. Shall you miss me, Madge?"

"I don't know," I replied, slowly. "Now some people I don't miss at all, and others I hate to have leave me. Yes, I shall miss you."

"Whom don't you miss?"

"Louise, for one."

"No wonder; the little plague! But now for those you dread to have leave you—it appears I am not of the number."

Easton Amory's name was on my lips, but somehow I could not bear to utter it. There was a feeling in my heart which made me loth to repeat its accents, though I often whispered them to myself.

"Do you mean Amory?" asked Walter, while his lip compressed slightly with their look of resolution.

"You need not speak," he continued, abruptly, almost harshly; "those eyes of yours are such tell-tales, they save you the trouble. Good-by, Madge—I am going now."

"Oh, stop! stop!" I exclaimed, as he hurried off, for I felt that he was angry, although I did not comprehend the reason, "don't go so—don't!"

He turned at my words, and came close to my side.

"What is it, Madge?"

"You are not vexed with me? Don't go away angry. Indeed, I shall miss you very much."

He stooped and smoothed my hair, in his gentle, caressing way.

"As much as Easton?" he asked.

I would not tell a lie, and I told him "No." He was not angry, not vexed, only sorrowful. He looked at me in the way that always brought tears to my eyes.

"Poor Madge!" he sighed; "poor little Madge!"

He looked wistfully at my forehead, in a manner which, had I been older, would have told me that he longed to press a kiss there; but he made no movement to do so.

"Yes, I am sorry you are going," I said, glancing forward to the loneliness of the weeks that lay before me. "I wish people never would go away—it's very stupid of them, I am sure."

He laughed a little, then repeated, more sorrowfully than before:

"Poor Madge!"

His hand lingered, for a moment, upon my hair, his eyes looked with an earnest meaning into my own, then, before I could move or find words to speak from the tide of emotions that choked me, he was gone, and I sat within the vine-wreathed arbor sorrowful and alone.

I was very sad for several days. I think I cried many times, though it would have gone hard with me if I had been forced to declare wherefore, because I myself did not know.

I thought of Easton Amory, and yearned to see him. I would have gladly gone out into the world in search of him, just as, years before, I longed to go up to heaven and find my lost mother.

About that time, romance and poetry began to have a new charm for me—I lived and reveled in the glorious imaginings which they depicted. I idled no longer in the real world—I formed for myself a beautiful realm, peopled with the beings of my own fancy, and dwelt there blessed in their companionship.

So I lived and dreamed, sometimes sorrowful, sometimes glad—equally unable to assign a reason for either emotion.

In a few weeks Mrs. Amory and her daughter returned, and for a time, the household resumed its old ways.

It was now autumn; for, after leaving the watering-place, they had spent some time in traveling. I was growing old enough to discover that Mrs. Amory needed constant change and excitement. She became restless and dissatisfied deprived of those mental stimulants to which she had been so long accustomed that she could no more have supported existence without their aid than an opium-eater deprived of his baleful but exhilarating drugs.

Miss Western had also returned, kind and attentive as ever. She expressed her surprise and satisfaction at the improvement I had made, but I do not think Louise shared at all in the latter feeling. She considered it necessary to administer sundry lectures upon the folly of a beggar being reared as I was, and quoted a certain proverb concerning their equestrian tendencies when placed on horseback; but I despised her more than ever.

"You look as much like a Hindoo as you always did," was nearly her first salutation. "Are you sure you haven't some outlandish idols hid away that you worship in delightful secrecy?"

"Yes, I have, but you will never see them," I replied, filled still with my romance and poetry.

"I wouldn't advise you to be impertinent," she said, sharply.

"I only answered your question," I replied.

"You have no business to do that unless you are ordered. If you look at me like that I'll tell mamma."

"I am sorry if my looks don't please you."

"I shouldn't think they would please anybody," she said, with a sneer.

"They do though," I retorted, pertly.

She had sense enough to know that I referred to Easton, and his frequently expressed admiration of my appearance.

"Leave this room!" she exclaimed furiously.

"If you come here again to-day I'll box your ears."

I retired triumphant and exulting, as any other girl of my age would have done, in my victory.

Mrs. Amory waited anxiously for the time to return to the city; she was weary of the country; its repose bored her; and I used to look at her in undisguised astonishment, as she exclaimed against the dullness of everything and everybody around; I would have asked no greater happiness than never to have left that beautiful place which she valued only as conducing to her position and importance.

I had, even at that age, a keen perception of the beautiful—strong artistic and poetic tastes, which, if rightly developed, would be to me a source of great benefit. Miss Western saw all that, and, unlike many others in her position, she was willing to bend her whole powers to the task of developing my faculties.

Her father had been an artist of no mean reputation, she inherited much of his talent, and had received from him thorough and honest principles in regard to art, which she made the basis of her teachings.

But I will linger no longer over these unimportant periods in my history; I only wish to seize and present the features, though it was necessary that I should dwell somewhat upon this season.

CHAPTER VI.

LOUISE AND I.

WE were settled in New York.

I was now thirteen, and Louise over fourteen; but in appearance I was her elder, as in all mental acquirements and natural talents I was her superior.

She had a slight, willowy figure, such as American girls often possess, very graceful and elegant, but lacking strength and vigor, and her movements were always languid and indolent. She had light, almost flaxen hair, delicate and finely cut features, but lacking character, and when she was not animated they had a peevish expression which detracted from their loveliness.

As for myself, I do not know if I was handsome—I think not. I was tall and slender, my step springy and elastic; the crimson of health mantled in my cheeks, and I certainly had magnificent eyes and hair; my mouth was never good—it expressed too much resolution, even self-will, to be agreeable in its expression.

We were as unlike in character as in personal appearance; in fact, Louise had very little, while I was only too independent and self-reliant. She was willful, irritable and false. She really had not sufficient energy to be very active even in her aversions, else I should have suffered much more than I did from her tyranny and dislike.

The most skillful masters were provided for her, but she benefited little by their instructions. She had a few showy accomplishments—she danced beautifully—played well, and sung in a sweet soprano voice that lacked expression as much as her face. She had no taste for books; even novels did not please her, unless they were the most vapid and unmeaning records of fashionable life.

As for me, the love of books was one of the strongest passions—I can use no other word—in my whole nature. Miss Western's watchfulness prevented my reading works that would have irretrievably injured my mind. I cannot be sufficiently grateful to her for that and all the other kindnesses which she bestowed upon me during her residence in the family.

The house was constantly filled with company, for Mrs. Amory was one of the queens of the fashionable world. Still young, she had lost nothing of the beauty for which, from her earliest girlhood, she had been celebrated, and her manners possessed a fascination which I never saw equaled except by one other—that was her nephew, Easton Amory.

In appearance, the two resembled each other, and there must have been many similar points in their characters—the same unyielding will, strong passions; all hidden under the charm of that delightful manner, but gaining new force from their very concealment.

I was always in Mrs. Amory's boudoir of a morning; it pleased her that I should sit there dressed in a somewhat fanciful costume, engaged with her netting silks, while she received her guests.

People used to stare at me a good deal, and praise my singular beauty—that always enraged me. Mrs. Amory was sufficiently kind to me—it was her way. She treated me just as she might have done a pet animal—regarded me in the same light that she did the ornaments purchased to decorate her room.

When she found that I possessed good elocutionary powers, she acquired a habit of making me read her to sleep on a rainy Sunday, or after the fatigues of a ball. Many a time have I been called out of bed at four o'clock in the morning, because she had just come home restless and weary, and fancied that the sound of my voice would soothe her. She meant no cruelty by such conduct; it never occurred to her that I could have any will but her own—any feeling but such as she graciously saw fit to permit me to indulge.

A love of admiration was a great weakness in her nature, strong and passionate as it was, and I, always enthusiastic, could not conceal how superhumanly grand and beautiful I considered her. I verily be-

lieve that my innocently uttered flatteries made her more kindly disposed toward me than she would otherwise have been. Very often, when dressed to go out, she would make some excuse for summoning me to her presence, that she might please herself with my artless admiration.

"A really poetic and artistic taste this child possesses," she said to Miss Western, as if in apology for her own weakness; "she certainly has a remarkable eye for color. After a while I must have her design all my costumes—I can judge of their effect so nicely."

A fine use, truly, to have devoted any artistic power I possessed, most assuredly; but it never would have occurred to Mrs. Amory that it could have been better employed than in gratifying her caprices, and I would gladly have done that, or any thing else, to have given her pleasure, for I was very, very grateful to her.

So the winter passed—flew I should say—for verily it had wings!

My life went on smoothly enough, but Louise fretted and rebelled. She longed to be out in the world—the amusements and pursuits proper for her age afforded her no satisfaction. She was in the drawing-rooms a great deal—always exquisitely dressed, and, of course, greatly petted and admired by her mother's guests.

I think Mrs. Amory perfectly worshiped her. She was the only person, except Easton, whose will had any influence over her. I cannot fancy Louise capable of having felt affection for any one but herself. She was often impertinent and ungrateful to her mother. I never heard her speak carelessly, or even look dissent to a wish, that I did not marvel how it was possible when her own, own parent had desired it. Louise would doubtless have laughed at my fancies had I expressed them; there was no such sentiment as reverence in her nature, and, indeed, her mother had so fondled and humored her, that it was to be expected she would have grown as selfish and ungovernable as she proved herself in every act of her life.

I cannot write much about that season; no one event stands out in sufficiently prominent relief to make its record interesting.

I did not see Easton Amory, although he was several times expected in town; but, upon each occasion, he sent some excuse instead of coming himself.

He was at college, I knew, and so was Walter Stuart; although, of course, I never heard the name of the latter mentioned. Once I astonished Miss Western quite out of her proprieties, and almost out of her senses, by abruptly making him a topic of conversation as we sat in the school-room one evening while Louise was gone to some fancy ball, given for young persons of her age.

"Does Walter Stuart never visit his aunt?" I asked, looking up from the drawing upon which I was engaged.

Miss Western's book dropped from her hand, and she sat regarding me with an expression of horror and astonishment which convulsed me with internal laughter.

"What did you say?" she exclaimed.

I very coolly repeated the question, while she stared at me more wonderingly than before.

"Is there any thing so remarkable in it?" I asked, at length somewhat vexed by her manner. "I am sure it is a very natural question to ask, as I never see him here, and know him to be her nephew."

"Miss Madge Wyld," returned the governess, leaning back in her chair, and recovering her wits and breath, "will you have the goodness to tell me where you gained that information?"

"From himself, to be sure," I replied, greatly amused by the commotion I had excited.

"Are you a witch?" asked the governess, laying down her book; "you certainly appear to learn every thing by intuition."

"I don't know how that may be—Easton often told me that I was one; but this morning, Miss Louise informed me that she thought it was my mother who had attained that honor."

Miss Western smiled a little—she was too precise for any thing further, but in spite of her decorum and wisdom, she enjoyed any sly hit at other people's follies.

"How do you happen to know Mr. Stuart?" she inquired; "tell me at once."

"I have no wish to make a secret of it. I met him in the park at Woodbrook—he was after his dog, and we had a long talk. I saw him several times, and I like him very well, although not as well as Easton."

"My dear child," returned that kind friend, "Mrs. Amory would be very angry if she knew of this; it must never occur again."

"It was not my fault, Miss Western; besides, how was I to know it was wrong to speak with him?"

"I am not blaming you, only giving you advice as to the future."

"Why does she dislike him?" I asked.

"Circumstances have separated the two families forever, and Mrs. Amory allows no communication between her household and that of Mrs. Stuart. You must respect that command, or you will forfeit her protection at once."

"What parted them?" I demanded, sharply. "I have always wondered what the reason could have been."

"I can not enter into details; indeed, I am not thoroughly acquainted with them, and if I were, it would not be proper to relate them to any one. But remember what I have told you! I shall not mention this conversation to Mrs. Amory, though I shall feel compelled to inform her if I know of your seeing Mr. Stuart again."

"Very well, ma'am, I will remember," was my answer, and there the matter dropped. I returned

to my half-finished drawing, and Miss Western again took up her book.

But while I worked, my brains were puzzling themselves, as they had so often done, for a solution to the mystery, though with no more success than usual; and before long Miss Western sent me to bed to dream out the affair at my leisure.

As, about that time, I had taken to composing verses and stories, between a poem that was in my head, and the wonderful mystery, it was long before I fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII.

WALTER STUART.

SPRING came again. I had been a year in my new home. Replete with interest and improvement had that year been to me. Who, to have seen me then, well clad, as much advanced in my studies as most girls of my age, would have recognized me as the street-sweeper of Broadway?

Mrs. Amory's amiable daughter occasionally reminded me of my former existence—dragging its revolting memories into the pleasantness of my new life; but otherwise, there was nothing to recall the darkness of that season.

To my extreme delight, we returned to Woodbrook in the latter part of May. When the carriage rolled along the broad avenue, I fairly clapped my hands and uttered an exclamation of pleasure. Louise curled her lip, but Mr. Amory looked at me with good-humored contempt—she liked such exhibitions—they were tributes to her might and wealth. I mentally determined that she should never again witness a similar one.

We had only been a few weeks at Woodbrook when an urgent summons called Mrs. Amory back to town, and Louise accompanied her. I knew there was some business connected with their affairs, for I heard Mrs. Amory say so, and likewise that they were to meet Easton in the city.

That latter fact accounted for the petted doll's taking the journey too! How I longed to accompany them; but I think Louise fancied that such was the case, for I was left behind.

When the carriage disappeared from view, I hurried into the woods, and, flinging myself upon the ground, gave way to a passion of tears. But I had one hope left—Easton might accompany them home. So I awaited their return with what patience I could, but was doomed to still deeper disappointment. At the expiration of a week, Mrs. Amory and Louise came, but Easton was not with them. Mrs. Amory looked tired and troubled—something had evidently gone wrong with her, for she appeared quite unlike herself.

A few days after, however, her banker came up to Woodbrook, and was closeted with her for several hours. After that interview, she recovered her spirits and customary manner. The only clew I had to the matter was when Miss Louise danced into my room the next morning, exhibiting a goodly supply of gold and bank-notes.

"Look here," she said. "I am going to visit the Livingston girls very soon, and this is to spend as I think proper. Mamma has been miserably cross for a week past—the idea, rich as she is, of being plagued about money! But I know that she and Easton both were, for their affairs are all united, and they quarreled horribly. Heigh-ho!" she continued, throwing herself upon my bed, and flinging the pillows at my favorite cat, "when I marry my cousin, I will set all these trifles right."

She marry Easton! I stooped, under pretense of caressing my poor kitten, but in reality to conceal my face, where a mingling of passion and grief were struggling for mastery.

I made no reply, nor did Louise volunteer any further information concerning either matter.

Louise went to make her visit, and Mrs. Amory accompanied her, full of life, and as magnificently beautiful as ever. I was left behind that time also—Louise was fearful that I might desire and enjoy the visit. Her delusion was a great relief to me. There was nothing I so much dreaded as being forced away from that beautiful spot to the homes of the insolent and great.

The summer passed much as the other had done. I saw Walter Stuart once, but it was no fault of mine. I did not inform Miss Western of this fact.

I had gone down to the river, and sat idly upon the shore, listening to the ripple of the waters, and watching the white sails as they floated slowly past like great birds drifting down the current. I was humming, in a rich but uncultivated voice, a song that I had caught from Louise, when I was startled by hearing another voice take up the refrain, and, raising my eyes, I saw Walter Stuart standing before me.

"I am so glad to see you," he said, holding out his hand with his beautiful, frank smile. "I have been here a week, and, as I leave to-morrow, I was afraid I should have to go without catching a single glimpse of you."

I quite forgot Miss Western's prohibition in the pleasure of seeing him, though I must confess to having experienced an instant's disappointment, for when I heard the voice, a thought that it might be Easton had flashed across my mind.

"You have grown very much," he said. "You will soon be a young lady, Madge—what then?"

"What then?" I repeated. "I don't know what you mean."

"What are you going to do—what are you going to be?"

"Do—be!" I murmured.

The words struck a chill to my heart; they had never before occurred to me. Now, I was bewildered by the suddenness with which they forced themselves upon my mind.

"Don't look so troubled," Stuart said, kindly;

"perhaps it was not wise in me to rouse such thoughts in that little head at present—we will forget them."

"No, no!" I interrupted, eagerly. "Let me think—let me think! You can not tell how strangely the words sound to me."

"But I can," he answered, with a sort of impatience, "for I have pondered them long and deeply in my mind. I likewise, Madge, have to be and to do! I am almost a man now, and my decision must soon be made."

"But rich people do nothing," said I. "Mrs. Amory never works, nor Louise, nor Easton."

Stuart stamped restlessly upon some bits of seaweed on the sand.

"Why did you speak of them, Madge?" he answered. "Do not make me feel bitter and bad-hearted to day. I am not rich. The hour that sees me of age will leave me a beggar, and my poor mother also."

"But you have a great house."

"On my twenty-third birthday we leave it forever, to seek a home where we can best find one. I am very poor, Madge, but richer, nevertheless, than my proud relatives. I have an unsullied conscience, and the love of a mother who is almost an angel."

"Easton is not proud," I said, with a rising of my old impatience, "if you mean him—he is kind and good."

Walter Stuart clenched his hands with sudden passion; his eyes flashed and his lips compressed; but the storm vanished as speedily as it had threatened.

"The last time I saw you, Madge," he said, "I promised that when you were older I would tell you a true story—the time has not yet come, but it soon will. In the meanwhile, do not let us talk of Easton Amory."

"I must not talk to you at all," I said, suddenly recollecting my governess' commands.

"What do you mean?"

"I was forbidden to speak to you again. I had forgotten all about it in my surprise at seeing you."

My bonnet was off. Walter Stuart stooped, and with the selfsame movement of old, stroked my hair, which was braided smoothly back from my face, repeating:

"Poor Madge, poor little Madge!"

We did not speak again for several moments, and his face grew soft and mournful with thoughts which I could not understand.

"Why do you always call me poor Madge?" I asked.

"Does it offend you?"

"No, not that, but everybody else is always telling me how fortunate I am—how happy I ought to be."

"And are you?"

"Yes, almost always very happy. Are you happy, Walter Stuart?"

"Oh, never mind, Madge; that is a difficult question for any human being to answer."

"I don't see why—"

"You are very young yet, Madge—young, and so innocent. God keep you always the same, little one! But let us say good-by now. When we meet again, each will be older—perhaps wiser."

"Shall you not come soon to visit your mother?"

"She will not be here—she goes with me. She would never have come near the place but for her promise."

"What promise?"

"No matter now. As I said, I shall have a story for you hereafter—time only can tell whether it will interest you."

"Now you puzzle me again," I said; "I can not tell at all what you mean, Walter Stuart."

"You need not know now," he answered, slowly; "time, I suppose, will teach you that, as it must many a thing that I would gladly keep from your knowledge forever. Good-by, Madge; you will not forget me?"

"Indeed I will not. I am sorry you are so gloomy. Good-by, Walter."

"Good-by, little Madge—good-by."

He looked as if there was something he wished to say, but would not, gazing into my eyes as if trying to read my very soul, while his lips moved involuntarily with thoughts that he did not utter.

Suddenly he turned so as to have a view of the tall chimneys and pointed roofs of Woodbrook, that showed themselves through the trees, and a great change passed over his face. He lifted a hard, stern front, and walked proudly away, as if that old house were some bitter enemy in whose presence he would exhibit neither fear nor pain; but his last look to me was one of kindness. The last words I heard him utter were:

"Poor Madge—poor little Madge!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECOND MEETING.

I HAD been two years in that house before I again saw Easton Amory. I was almost fifteen then, so much changed from the ragged child he had seen in Broadway, that it would have been difficult for any one to have recognized me as the same.

We were at Woodbrook; his aunt had been expecting him for several weeks, but he so often disappointed her when she looked for his coming, and I myself had so many times wept till I was quite ill with the grief of not seeing him, that I had not, on that occasion, allowed myself to expect him so eagerly—at least, I thought such was the case; probably if he had failed to arrive, I should have shed as many tears as before, although I considered such exhibitions very childish, out of the wisdom which I believed myself to have attained.

He came at last.

I watched from the top of the stairs the meeting

between him and his relatives, saw how tall, manly, and proud he had grown; and when they all entered Mrs. Amory's sitting-room, to converse unrestrainedly, I hurried out of the house, weeping passionately over my loneliness.

After all, his coming had brought me to tears—bitter, burning tears. I was shut out from every one—I had no friends, no companions; I could not even approach him whom I worshiped as something high above all other human beings—the one who had saved me from misery and want.

At last I dried my tears, and wandered into the flower-garden, where it was my great delight to walk. The gardener had good-naturedly given me a flower-bed of my own, which I worked with the utmost diligence, and watched my blossoms unfold with all the ecstasy which only a lover of nature can experience.

While I stood there, Easton Amory came down the steps of the terrace, smoking his cigar. My first impulse was to hide myself; much as I had longed to see him, I felt a sudden fear for which I could not account.

He walked leisurely into the garden, and evidently did not recognize me until he had approached quite near to the place where I stood. He looked at me sharply, then the expression changed to one of astonishment, while I remained trembling, unable either to speak or run away.

"Is it possible that you are Madge?" he exclaimed.

I could only look up with a sudden burst of tears; my heart was so full of mingled emotions that they could express themselves in no other way.

He hurried to me and shook my hand eagerly, talking rapidly all the while.

"Why, you little Gipsy, you have grown handsome as a picture! How tall you are! and, Phidias! what eyes and hair! Can't you speak, you wild Madge? Aren't you at all glad to see me?"

"Oh, so glad, so glad!" I exclaimed, between my sobs. "You can't think—Oh, Easton! Easton!"

"Well, don't cry then; that is a strange way to show your joy," and his merry laugh enabled me a little to restrain my feelings.

"I know it is very foolish," I said; "but I couldn't help crying—I thought of so many things."

"Of what, you silly puss?"

"All your goodness to me—how you took me away from that dreadful place, and—"

"There, there, don't think of it!" he said, patting my hand kindly.

"I can't help it; I must, you know."

"But I do not like it! After all, it is I who have to be grateful; you know you saved my life."

I dried my eyes at that proud, exultant thought; it was the one act of my life which made me a heroine in my own view of the case.

"How your eyes shine, Madge! Why, what a rosy-cheeked Gipsy you have grown!"

Then I laughed quite gayly, for my spirits were always as easily excited by kindness as they were depressed by a cool look.

"And how do you get on?" he asked.

"So well," I answered. "Miss Western says I learn very fast—and oh, Easton, she has taught me to draw. I work and study as hard as I can."

"That is right; and so you are to be a painter?"

"No, no, I am not such a baby as that. But don't you remember it was you said I had so much talent for drawing? You saw my little sketches—"

"Perhaps so," he said, doubtfully.

"Oh, have you forgotten that?" I exclaimed, with a pang of disappointment.

"No, no, of course not; I only wanted to vex you a little. I remember it very well."

"I am glad you did not forget—very glad."

"You must show me some specimens of your work. What does my aunt say to them?"

"I never showed her any—she would not care for them, you know, she sees so many real pictures."

"And Louise?"

"Oh, she never likes any thing I do. I always put my drawings out of sight when I hear her coming."

"Indeed! then I suppose she is as amiable as ever?"

I did not answer. I was an honorable girl, and would not speak ill of my benefactress' daughter, although I was quite old enough to see clearly her shallowness, her meanness, want of truth and talent.

"You don't say any thing," pursued Easton; "well, I perfectly understand without."

"She was very anxious to see you," I replied, wishing to say something in her favor; "only the other day I heard her wondering if you would ever come."

"Many thanks for her solicitude," he said, with a sneer. "I am sorry that I can not return the compliment; nor does seeing at all change the opinion I had formed before."

In my heart I was glad that he did not like her, and yet I pitied her; it seemed a terrible thing to be out of favor with Easton, and I thought how miserable she would be if she could have heard his words.

"How long since you have been here?" I said, my thoughts going back to the time that had elapsed since I first saw him. It seemed like looking down upon another life to review the existence which I had left so far behind.

"Have you wanted to see me also?" he asked.

"Very much; surely, Easton, you can not think me so ungrateful."

"Now don't use that word," he interrupted, with one of his quick changes of humor; "I hate it worse than any other in the English language. If I had to feel grateful to any one, I should want to tear his heart out, and I don't wish you to hate me, Madge."

"There is not much danger."

"I think not," he said, with his proud smile; "I think not."

"Shall you stay all summer here?" I inquired.

"That depends—I do not know how long," he replied, absently, then added, "No, not the whole summer, of course, but for several weeks, if I find it pleasant. Shall you like having me here, my Gipsy princess?"

"I shall be so happy!" I exclaimed, with my usual passionate abruptness.

"But Louise will torment your life out if I even look at you," he said, with a laugh.

"I shall not mind her; if you speak pleasantly she can not do any thing to annoy me."

He gave me a quick, searching look.

"How old are you, Madge?" he asked.

"I shall soon be fifteen," I replied.

"You look full that," he answered; "and you are very handsome, Madge—has any one told you so?"

"No; I thought Louise was handsome; I didn't think I could be with this brown face."

"Why, you are as bewitching as only a brunette can be," he returned; "that brilliant skin and rich color are worth twenty times as much as Louise's baby face; but don't always drag her into the conversation. I have to see enough of her, goodness knows; I want to forget her when she is out of my sight."

At that moment Louise appeared upon the steps of the terrace, and looked around as if searching for some one.

"She wants you," I whispered.

"Dunce take her! I hope she will not see me! Is there no place to hide?"

But, as he spoke, Louise's eyes fell upon the spot where we were standing.

"Madge!" she called sharply; "Madge!"

"What do you want of her?" asked Easton, before I could speak.

"I want her to come into the house," she replied.

"And I want her to stay here," he said, coolly, puffing out a volume of smoke.

"Madge!" exclaimed Louise, fairly stamping her foot, "if you don't come here this moment, I'll go and tell mamma!"

"I am coming," I answered, and moved forward.

"Don't go," whispered Easton; "what do you care for her mother? I will see that you get into no trouble."

"Please let me go," I said, pleadingly; "I ought to obey, you know."

"Not for long," I heard him mutter, "not for long."

He looked at me eagerly, and with an expression which I did not comprehend.

"Madge Wyld!" called Louise, "I ask you once more if you are coming?"

"Yes—yes," I said, hurrying on.

"There is no such great haste," Easton said, following me. When we reached the foot of the terrace, he added, "Well, Louise, is the end of the world at hand? You called out as if nothing of less importance could be the matter."

"I wanted Madge," returned Louise, angrily; "she is never at hand when she is needed."

"What do you want?" I asked.

"Don't speak until you are told!" she exclaimed; "you grow more impertinent every day."

I colored violently, and Easton laughed in a way that aggravated her anger.

"What is wrong now?" he asked. "Dear me, Louise, don't bite your lips so—it is said to be a sign of ill-temper."

"Go up-stairs, Madge!" she exclaimed, evidently annoyed that I should be a witness to Easton's raillery.

"Oh, nonsense," returned he; "let her stay here."

"She is to go into the house, I say! and another time, mis', don't let me catch you in the garden—you have no business whatever there."

"Oh, ho, that is the head and front of her offending, is it?" said Easton; "oh, poor Louise!"

She was ready to cry with passion, and I said:

"Mrs. Amory gave me leave to go there whenever I liked."

She darted a furious look at me, and wheeled round; her arm struck a vase, placed upon the balustrade; it had not been properly set in its place, and it tottered—was falling directly upon her head, when I darted forward, pushed her aside, and received the blow upon my arm.

I staggered back from the violence of the shock, and Easton caught me, or I should have fallen.

"Run for some water, Louise!" he called; "good heavens, she has fainted!"

I shook my head to show that I was not insensible, but felt too sick and weak to open my eyes.

"Can't you stir, Louise?" he repeated.

"I feel very faint," she said; "I am so frightened."

"You are a fool," I heard him mutter.

He helped me to a seat, and I opened my eyes. He ran into the house and brought a glass of water, which he forced me to drink.

"Are you better?" he asked, anxiously.

"Much; I am not hurt I think."

Louise was just preparing for the hysterics customary with her upon every possible occasion, when Mrs. Amory appeared.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "Louise, my darling, are you hurt?"

"Not in the least," replied Easton; "she must needs tumble a stone vase onto her head, but Madge knocked it away. The child's arm must be broken."

It pained me excessively now, and was already badly swollen. Mrs. Amory came toward me and touched it.

"It is only sprained," she said; "Madge, you are a brave girl. Louise, come and thank her."

"For what? I think if you would see if I am hurt, instead of making a goose of her, it would be as well. I am as sick and faint as possible."

"Easton, please assist your cousin," said Mrs. Amory, "while I take Madge to the housekeeper, and have her arm bathed."

"She is too weak to walk," he said.

I saw Mrs. Amory's angry look.

"I can walk," I said; "indeed, I am not much hurt."

"You are a very courageous child," she began, warmly, but checked herself at Louise's movement of anger; she was evidently divided between her feeling of kindness toward me and her fear of some outburst upon her daughter's part.

"Come," she said, "you must have something put on your arm, Madge."

Easton followed me.

"Stay with your cousin," said his aunt; "I will return in a moment."

"Excuse me," he replied; "I have some feelings of humanity; I choose to know if she is injured."

"I wish she had been killed!" exclaimed Louise. Springing from her seat, she swept into the hall, and up the stairs.

"Louise is so nervous," said Mrs. Amory; "she will be obliged to Madge when she has time to think the matter over."

"Do you think so?" he asked, coolly.

"Come, Madge," she said, impatiently; "come with me."

She took me to the housekeeper, and my arm was dressed.

"You had better go to bed at once," Mrs. Amory said; "I will see that you have a cup of tea."

"Oh, let her sit up," Easton urged.

She made me a sign which I understood, and I went at once up to the school-room, where Miss Western consoled with me upon my accident, and I chafed with anger and impatience.

"You perhaps saved Miss Louise's life," said the governess.

"She said she wished I had been killed," I replied.

Miss Western exclaimed incredulously:

"Why, Madge!"

"She did! I would kill myself if I had so mean a disposition as hers."

"Hush! hush!" she said, reprovingly. "You must not talk in that way. Is your arm better?"

"A little; but it aches badly yet."

"You and I will have a cup of tea," she said; "then you shall lie down on the sofa, and I will read to you."

"You are very good," I answered, the tears rising to my eyes, but my pride gave me strength to keep them back.

It was a long time before my arm got well; I do not think Louise ever forgave me for the service I rendered her.

I suffered a great deal during that visit of Easton's—a season to which I had looked forward with so much anxiety. But I seldom saw him; when I did, it was but for a few moments, and he would have only time to give me a look or a word.

When the day came for him to depart, I was determined to bid him good-by; I was too young to think there was any impropriety in the act. I took my way through the park to the lodge-gates, and waited there until the carriage drove down.

He looked out and saw me, ordered the driver to stop, and sprung from his seat.

"There you are!" he exclaimed. "I hunted the house over to find you, and came to the conclusion that Louise must have shut you up."

I shook my head and smiled faintly through my tears.

"Did you come here to bid me good-by, Gipsy?"

"Yes, I replied; "I could not let you go without seeing you."

"You are a little angel," he said, kissing my forehead. "By the time I see you again, you will be grown a young lady." He bent nearer and nearer and whispered, "Mind you love me as well then as now!"

For the first time some undefined thought made my heart beat rapidly.

"Good-by now, Madge," he said, kissing me again; "good-by, you black-eyed beauty."

"When will you come again?" I asked.

"I shall see you this winter," he answered; "remember, it will be only you that I shall care a straw for seeing."

He bade me farewell once more, sprang into the carriage, and was driven rapidly away. I stood watching until a turn in the road hid the vehicle from view, then I wept my tears dry, and walked slowly toward the house.

I met Louise in the avenue, and she demanded, with her usual imperiousness:

"Where have you been, Madge Wyld?"

"I went to bid Easton good-by," I replied, boldly.

"You are an insolent, good-for-nothing little wretch!" she exclaimed, raising her hand as if to strike me.

"That is the arm the vase fell on," I replied, quietly; "you can hurt it if you wish."

She dropped her hand, and walked away without a word. Perhaps even her dull nature felt a little shame at her own harshness and cruelty.

CHAPTER IX.

A MAIDEN DREAM.

I DID not see Easton Amory until about two years after that time—two long, long years—for he did not keep his promise; some quarrel with his aunt separated them for a season.

I was sitting alone in Mrs. Amory's dressing-room one morning, busily occupied with my needlework, when I heard her voice in the hall, addressing a servant:

"Tell Miss Louise that her cousin, Mr. Amory, is in the library."

My heart gave one bound and then stood still; the muslin dropped from my fingers, and I sat cold and rigid, as if the words had transformed me to stone. I caught the reflection of my face in a mirror opposite—my cheeks were very pale, and my eyes restless and anxious as those of a wild animal seeking to break from its imprisonment.

I heard Louise descend the stairs with her usual listless step; I saw the flutter of her silken garments through the half open door, and I grew sick with the whirl of passion and emotion which the sight of her roused in my mind.

For the first time I comprehended my own feelings—I was blind no longer—that revelation suddenly dawned upon me, and my heart thrilled to its new sensations like an amaryllis bursting suddenly into bloom.

I knew that I loved Easton Amory with all the intensity of a strong nature, all the fervor of a will, despotic and tameless as that of a tiger in an Eastern jungle.

If he loved me I did not then think; I could only listen to the voice sounding in my heart, loud and clear, like triumphal music, rousing a host of beautiful visions that came trooping up like a troop of golden sunbeams at summer's call.

How I got through that day I cannot tell. I recollect that when Mrs. Amory entered the apartment, hours after, I sat there so white and silent, that even she observed it, and asked me if I were ill. She bade me lay aside my work and go out to walk, giving me several small commissions to execute.

I dressed myself and went forth into the cold, wintry air that blew refreshingly upon my forehead, restoring me to strength and life. I walked far down Broadway—past the crossing where I had long before met my fate—hurrying on, anxious to feel that I was really awake.

It was quite dark when I returned, and as I went up-stairs, Louise opened the door of her chamber and called me in.

"How do I look?" she demanded, anxiously. I could conscientiously give an answer that pleased her, for I had never seen her appear so lovely.

She was nearly eighteen now, and had, that season, been introduced into society, although somewhat against her mother's wishes, for her health was not good; but Louise's persuasions, fretfulness, and determination to be ill unless allowed to have her own way, prevailed over Mrs. Amory's judgment.

She was already a great belle, owing to her beauty and her reputation as an heiress. She was quite in her element now, going out every night to a succession of gay balls, living only upon excitement, and already as listless and jaded as a woman of forty when the stimulant was for an hour withdrawn.

Her maid had just finished dressing her, and she stood beside me flushed and smiling, with a consciousness of her own charms.

Her dress of India muslin, starred and spotted with gold, was extremely becoming to her delicate complexion, and the pearls twined among her light ringlets added to the effect.

"We are going to the opera, and from there to Mrs. Addison's ball," she said, in explanation of her early toilet. "Easton is here, so we shall be very gay for some time."

I left the room as quickly as possible, although she had various trifling duties for me to perform before she would release me.

I have seldom felt so excited as on that night. There was a fever in my veins, lighting my eyes, crimsoning my cheeks, and leaving me without a moment's rest. Miss Western had been dismissed months before, as her services were no longer required; so I had not a single friend to whom I could go for counsel or sympathy. Poor, dear old governess! We never met after her departure for Europe, but I am glad to know that she married well, and in a house of her own found happiness enough to compensate for the trials of her earlier life.

I was alone with my wild fancies, and I paced up and down the long gallery for nearly an hour, without even stopping to lay aside my bonnet.

I heard the door of Louise's chamber open at last, and shrunk into my room to avoid meeting her. I waited until the dinner was over; heard Louise ascend the stairs to prepare for going out; and, when she had gone down-stairs, I stole into the hall once more.

I listened to catch a tone of Easton's voice, but did not hear it, though Louise's laugh rung up to the landing where I stood, as they passed through the hall below on their way to the carriage.

There was a mist before my eyes, so that I could distinguish nothing; once I clasped my hands over them with a quick fear that I was going blind, and before I removed them I heard the outer door close behind the gay party.

I returned to my room and began dressing myself as if for a party. I braided my long hair in a thousand tiny plaits, wound it about my head with knots of crimson flowers, and put on a rich silk dress of the same hue, relieved by bars of white—a recent gift from Mrs. Amory. When I was dressed I looked in the mirror, and knew that I was beautiful. Never had the consciousness been so strong upon me as then. I was glad—not from any feeling of gratified vanity, but a fierce, exulting joy, for which I had no name.

I went down to the gorgeous drawing-rooms, where the subdued light of the chandeliers lent new

richness to the surrounding objects, and flung myself carelessly on a couch.

I must have rested there for hours—my excitement had passed away, leaving me in a sweet, delicious dream, which I had no power to break. A clock in the lower rooms struck ten—at the same moment I heard a key turn in the street door—it opened—there was a step in the hall to which my pulses kept time—the drawing-room door was flung ajar, and Easton Amory entered.

The immense apartments were divided by an arch, supported by marble pillars, back from which swept the folds of a velvet curtain. I was in the shadow of the drapery, lying there perfectly helpless, while that eager step crossed the soft carpet, which gave back no echo under the tread.

He was somewhat changed since we parted; taller, more manly, with a short, black mustache, lending a prouder curve to his mouth and a brighter light to his eyes. He stepped as if born to command—to me he was the incarnation of all that was glorious, almost divine.

He did not see me—he turned to go out. I could not speak—my senses seemed deserting me—I gave a cry, which had been a vain effort to pronounce his name, and almost lost consciousness.

When I came to myself I was clasped tightly to Easton Amory's bosom; his heart throbbed full against my own, his kisses were hot upon my forehead and lips—their fervor had recalled me to life.

I lay very still, my breath coming in quick sighs, while he murmured over me words sweeter in my ear than the tones of an angel.

"Look up," he whispered, in that voice whose melody I never heard equaled, and which thrilled like fire through my veins. "Speak to me, my darling, my bird."

He raised my head upon his shoulder, and looked with his bewildering eyes far down the depths of my intralled soul. I could not stir—there was something in his glance which had a magnetic influence over me, and left me powerless in his embrace as a charmed bird.

"Have you waited for me?" he asked; "have you wished for my coming?"

Again his lips pressed mine—it seemed as if that caress unlocked my tongue. I did not attempt to free myself; I was too happy, lying there; but I answered eagerly:

"Waited! I thought I should never see you again—never. Why did you not come before?"

"I could not, Madge; it was impossible! Do not blame me; I, too, have longed and pined for this meeting. I hoped to see you this morning, but could not ask; so I stole away from that tiresome party, and hurried here without any one's knowing it, certain that I should find my darling. Say, are you happy now?"

"So happy, oh, so happy!"

I spoke only the truth—and in the innocence of my soul there was no thought which could make me fear to acknowledge it.

For some time I could not talk much; but at length my thoughts came back more collectedly, and even I, careless and impulsive as I was, had a feeling that I should not be sitting thus alone with any one.

We walked slowly up and down those great rooms—Easton's arm encircling my waist—and conversed of many things—every thing that had happened to me during our long separation—my hopes and fears—all that had now settled into a delicious happiness beyond the power of words to express.

"Are they kind to you?" Easton asked at length.

"Yes," I said, "Mrs. Amory is very kind; as for Louise, I never pay any attention to her humors."

"The fool," muttered he; "the little painted doll; does she dare to treat you badly?"

"Not badly; but she is very capricious, and will be only a spoiled child all her days."

"Her life is not of as much worth as the least of your smiles," returned Easton, vehemently. "I perfectly detest the creature, I wish—"

He added something in a lower tone, which I did not understand.

That was a blessed evening to me, although my brain was in such a whirl that I could not taste half its happiness. I was like a sick man who has a cooling draught offered him, and spills it in his eagerness to seize the refreshing beverage!

Easton asked to see some of my paintings; and I led him to one that Mrs. Amory had placed in the parlor only a few days before—I learned, afterward, as the work of Louise.

It was a forest scene—the original sketch had been taken at Woodbrook, and it was the most ambitious effort I had attempted.

"Did you do that?" he asked.

"Certainly—why not?"

"Only to-day Louise told me they bought it at a sale—mean little thing!"

"Oh, it is no matter," I said. Indeed it seemed of very little consequence to me then.

"You have done wonders," he returned; "who taught you?"

"Miss Western, while she stayed; since then I have watched Louise's masters while they were doing her pictures."

"You will be a great woman yet," he said, laughingly, "and look down on us all."

"Do you think the day near at hand?" I asked, laughing in turn at his jest.

"She is anxious for it," he continued; "she wants the whole world at her feet, to be petted and caressed by every body."

"No, no," I replied quickly; "I only care for—"

"For what?" he asked, when I hesitated. "Speak—speak, I hate unfinished sentences."

"For your approval," I replied; and the answer seemed to please him.

At that moment a carriage rolled along the pavement and stopped before the house. It was very late; we had forgotten the passing hours.

"My aunt!" said Easton. "I must go; if they saw me here they would make you suffer for it."

He clasped me again in a passionate embrace, and then crossed the parlors, threw open one of the windows, stepped into the balcony, and leaped lightly down.

"Good-night, Juliet!" I heard him whisper, as he ran along the garden path.

I went up-stairs, and was in my chamber before the sleepy servant had opened the door to them. I had taken off my dress and put on a plainer one, when Mrs. Amory's maid came to my chamber—her mistress desired me to come at once and read to her.

Mrs. Amory was thoroughly out of humor. I knew very well the cause—it was owing to Easton's having deserted them so unceremoniously at the opera, and not appearing at the ball during the whole evening. I amused myself with imagining what her feelings would have been could she have known that he had spent the intervening hours with me.

I had to read to her for a long time; but she fell asleep at last, and I stole away to my chamber, to reflect upon my own exceeding happiness.

The dawn struggled up into the sky, and found me still sitting there—dreaming—dreaming!

I did not see Easton the next day, although he called; but I heard his step, his voice—it was something! During the following weeks he was there daily, although he no longer made his home at the house.

Mrs. Amory gave a grand ball—the last of the season—for Lent was near at hand. I sat in my chamber listening to the music as it floated up on the perfumed air, mingled with the tread of the dancers, and the gay laughter of the young and thoughtless. I had no wish to join them; I felt no bitterness or resentment at being shut out from such pleasures, as if I had been a creature of another mold from those dainty, fortune-favored girls, not one of whom was superior either in mind or appearance. There was no craving in my soul for the universal admiration which Louise desired—had it been placed within my reach, the excitement upon which she existed would soon have palled my spirit. I longed for something nobler, higher—for sympathy, appreciation, and for love—my heart panted and burned for that.

They who have always had kind friends to lavish affection upon them, understand little the intensity with which a lonely, passionate creature, such as I was, snatched at any glimpse of love offered. I had no thought but for him whom I loved—into whose eyes I had looked, until the rest of the world had passed from my sight, so that wherever I turned I could see only his image.

The next day I was sitting with Mrs. Amory in her dressing-room, trying to amuse her with a novel, when Easton entered the apartment.

I must have grown very pale, but Mrs. Amory did not observe it, and he greeted me kindly enough, but as if I had been a child. I was displeased, nay, grieved. I felt that, had I been in his place, I should not have been unwilling to betray my affection. I should have had too much jealous pride to have hesitated even an instant. But I did not blame him—oh no, I could not have done that.

I longed to talk with him, but that was impossible; and there I sat in silence over some work I had taken up, while he conversed gayly with his aunt and cousin, no one heeding me any more than if I had been a stick or a stone.

I left the room and went to my chamber, but I could not be quiet while I knew that he was in the house. I went down-stairs into the library, and while I stood there Easton entered the room, giving me the welcome that my heart coveted.

"Be happy," he whispered; "you will see me at Woodbrook this summer."

There was no time to add anything further. He left the house, but I returned to my duties quiet and at ease.

"Madge!" called Louise, as I entered the dressing-room, "pick these out for me, I can't!" She threw a tangled mass of embroidery silks toward me as she spoke. "Oh, Madge, where is my smelling-bottle? I am sure you had it! I do wish you would let my things alone and be less disagreeable. Oh, here is the thing—well, no matter! How mamma's work-box looks. I thought you prided yourself on your neatness. I should be ashamed of it if I were you."

That was the usual style of the beauty's conversation to me, but I never paid the least attention, so we got on after a fashion.

Spring came at last, and we went to Woodbrook. Mrs. Amory was strangely quiet, and appeared much troubled. Once, during the journey, she began speaking of her affairs, but Louise would not listen.

"Now, don't bore me, mamma! Can't you borrow money if you haven't it? You must have, though."

"Borrow!" returned Mrs. Amory, with a bitter laugh. "How much do you suppose I owe?"

"I neither know nor care. We live at a fearful expense, to be sure; but one must live! Ask Easton to help you."

The young lady sunk back and composed herself to slumber, while her mother looked so anxious and wretched that I pitied her, but, of course, did not venture to speak; for, although she liked me, Mrs. Amory never, in the slightest degree, admitted me into her confidence.

CHAPTER X.

THE PROMISED HISTORY.

WE had been at Woodbrook nearly two weeks when Easton Amory arrived. He looked thin and pale, and his aunt was fearful that he had been unwell.

He denied there having been anything the matter with him, and seemed annoyed at her solicitude, whereat Louise laughed in her irritating way. He gave her one of his fiery looks—

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing, of course."

"Such is frequently the case," he replied, with a sneer, but his actions affected her not at all.

"Young men noted for their steady habits are apt to be ill at a moment's warning," returned she.

Easton's dark cheek flushed slightly, but Louise left the room before he could give utterance to the sharp reply I saw flashing in his eyes.

"You must excuse Louise," said Mrs. Amory; "she is far from well; then, too, she has other causes for irritation—I do not wonder much at it."

She gave Easton a significant and even angry look, the meaning of which I did not at all comprehend; but he only replied, indifferently:

"Oh, that is it, eh?—I wish I had a book to read till luncheon—since I have not I think I will go to the stables and see the horses."

He flashed a glance at me which I understood quickly enough. It bade me meet him in the grounds, but I found it impossible to comply with his demand.

Mrs. Amory was pacing the room with quick, uneven steps, after a habit she had when disturbed in her mind. She caught my eyes fixed upon her, but evinced no anger. Perhaps even she, distant and proud as she was, felt glad of the sympathy which my face must have expressed if it was any index to my heart.

She threw herself upon a sofa with a faint sigh, sweeping her hands across her forehead as if trying to dispel the thoughts that troubled her.

"Read to me," she said; "this dull place will kill me! I must have company in the house or I shall go mad." Then she muttered to herself: "After next week every thing will be settled."

I did not understand what she meant—it was not until long afterward that the entire significance of her words was revealed to me. Anxious as I was to go out, of course there was nothing for it but to sit patiently down and do as I was bidden.

I read to her for several hours, but I could no more have told a single line in the book than if I had been puzzling over Sanscrit. After a time Easton looked into the room and finding me thus engaged, came in to listen; but Mrs. Amory soon found an excuse for dismissing him, and sent him to Louise.

The next day, their man of business came up, and there was a long, stormy discussion in the library. I heard the sound of angry voices as I passed through the hall—those of Mrs. Amory and Easton in fierce recrimination.

I went up to Louise's chamber; she was fast asleep on her bed; so, certain that I should not be missed, I hurried off to my old haunt—the glen in the furthest part of the woods—as I had not been able to visit it since my return.

I was dreaming, after my old fashion, under the trees—reflecting upon my own great happiness, but never asking myself how it was all to end. Strange that the thought never occurred to me. I looked fixedly at the sunlight, and so dazzled my eyes that I could not see the gloom gathering in the distance.

I was now seventeen; my birth day had passed several weeks before, and though still a mere girl in years, my heart had gained the maturity of womanhood.

I sat on the turf watching the clouds through the branches of the great trees, my heart throbbing gleefully as the song of a bird, without a thought beyond the brightness of my dream.

"Madge!" called a voice I knew very well, though it awoke no echoes in my soul; "Madge!"

I turned my head without speaking, and saw Walter Stuart leaning on the wall, beckoning me to approach.

I had not seen him for a long, long time, but he was much less altered than I. He was taller; his form had gained more breadth and force; but there was the same sunny gleam upon his brown hair, the same kindly expression to his face.

I was very glad to see him, and, at his summons, went quickly forward to greet him. We stood there for a long time, talking of everything that connected our little past, when I remembered the revelations he had often promised to make, the thought of which had long haunted me. There was so much I wished to know, and his story might contain the information I desired.

When I had made my request, he gazed at me for a little while in silence, and his features changed as they always did when he looked full into my eyes.

"You are a woman now," he said, slowly.

"Yes; and surely I may hear the story you promised to tell me, oh, so long ago."

"You have not forgotten my words then?"

"Certainly not; I have often thought of them, and puzzled myself to find their meaning."

"Who is at Woodbrook?" he asked.

"No one but the family, and—and—Mrs. Amory's nephew."

I could not pronounce the name—my eyes fell under his, and I felt my cheeks grow hot.

"I understand," he said, in the sad tone his voice so frequently assumed; "I understand! I see that you are still little Madge, poor little Madge!"

Those words carried me back to our last parting—how far back in the past it looked! I had lived so

much in that time, gone so far away from the old childishness that had gladdened my spirits then, unconscious of the spell which lay on my heart, and which had since awakened in its might.

I fancied Walter Stuart understood my thoughts—he was very quick of comprehension. He shrouded his eyes for an instant with his hand, and when he removed it, a great light had gone out of his face—it looked gloomy as water when the sun has ceased to shine.

"Come here," I said, "and sit down by me; I want to talk."

I know that he forgot where we were, or, in that mood, no persuasion could have induced him to enter those grounds; but at my bidding he sprang over the wall and seated himself by my side.

"Now tell me that story," I urged. "I am so anxious to hear it."

"Very soon I will; I want to ask you a few questions first. Are you happy? Answer me that."

"Very happy."

The tone, the expression of my face, must have been their own evidence of my sincerity.

"And what have you been doing all these years since we parted?" he questioned.

"Very little; nothing worth repeating, or that I could put in words; my life has been always quiet."

"So much the better, so much the better."

"And you," I asked; "you are not still in college?"

"Oh, no; I graduated more than two years ago. Since that time I have been at work, Madge, and the greater portion of it, very hard at work."

"Have you been long here?"

"We came yesterday, my mother and I—for the last time."

"For the last time?" I repeated.

"Yes, Madge; to-morrow will be my twenty-third birthday—then we leave this place forever."

"I cannot understand you at all; you puzzle me as much as you did when I was a child."

"It is very easy to understand, nevertheless."

"Then do explain—I hate mysteries—please clear up this one of yours, for it seems there is a mystery."

"Before I say a word," he returned, "make me a promise!"

"If I can keep it—"

"Promise not to be angry with me because my story happens to be unlike that you have heard from others."

"I have never heard any thing—you do not think Mrs. Amory would talk to me?"

"Very well—do not be offended."

"I never was angry with you," I replied; "certainly I shall not begin now when we are parting for a long, long time."

"Yes," he said, "I suppose so—it must be so! Oh, Madge," he continued, with more fervor than I had ever heard him speak, "there is so much I would wish to say, but dare not—you would not like to listen! Well, well, time will settle every thing."

He broke off abruptly, and when he spoke again he had recovered the calmness which so became him, giving such an idea of self-trust and repose that it lent me strength to be in his presence.

"You have often asked me how I could be poor and live in such a beautiful place—I will tell you. This was our house until I became twenty-three. It might be mine for life if I would submit to certain conditions—but I would die first."

"What conditions?"

"Madge, years ago, when Easton Amory and I were very young—too young to have much recollection of the events of the time, and Louise only a cross baby—we lived together at Woodbrook, all alike dependent upon the caprices of a cross, peevish grandfather. The husbands of my mother and Mrs. Amory had been half-brothers."

"His fortune was to be equally divided among us, he said, and he treated us all as if such was to be the case. The estate was immense, and he had much other property besides, so there was naturally a prospect of great wealth in store."

"My dear, kind mother seldom thought of the future; but Mrs. Amory used to wish daily for the old man's death—she often expressed that desire, though to him she was all kindness and attention, but she is so made up of falsehood and deceit that she is incapable of a noble thought."

"My mother and she were never very friendly—there had been trouble between them in their girlish days, and neither had forgotten it. They were civil enough, but they kept away from each other, each possessing a suit of apartments at different sides of the house."

"One day there came a stranger to Woodbrook—a man still young, but with a look of sorrow and resignation. I was a little child, it is true, but I never shall forget the impression his appearance made upon me."

"Easton and I were in the great hall when he entered. My grandfather was confined to his bed—he was always ailing; but I remember distinctly that it was my mother for whom the gentleman inquired. However, it was not my mother, but Mrs. Amory, who obeyed the summons."

"I was sitting at the foot of the stairs when she came down, splendidly dressed, but so pale that I remarked it—trembling violently and clutching at the banisters for support. Her lips moved as she passed, but uttered no sound, and she walked on into the reception-room, leaving me quite frightened at her appearance and manner."

CHAPTER XI.

THE STORY CONTINUED.

WALTER STUART paused for a moment, but I motioned him to proceed, and he went on with his narrative.

"It might have been half an hour after, when I was roused by a quick step on the stairs, and my mother appeared, whiter than the muslin robe she wore—her lips compressed, her hands clasped like one in mortal agony. I did not dare speak to her; she sped by me like a specter. Her woman—a faithful, devoted creature—stood watching her from the landing. My mother paused in the hall, and called in a strange voice:

"Did you say in there, Mariette? Did you say in there?"

"There was a sound from the reception-room—the door opened and the stranger appeared."

"Isabel, Isabel!" he cried.

"My mother turned, tottered, and would have fallen if he had not caught her in his arms and carried her into the room he had just left."

"I saw nothing further, for the door closed, and though I shrieked and stamped, no attention was paid to me until the maid came down and tried to pacify me, but I pushed her off, screaming:

"They will kill mamma; they will kill mamma."

"Half an hour might have passed, when the door opened again, and then Mrs. Amory came out. I never saw so terrible a sight as she presented. Her black hair had fallen loose, and her face was so convulsed with passion that she looked like a fiend. The gentleman stood in the doorway supporting my mother, whose eyes were shut although she was not insensible. I could see by the convulsive movements that shook her frame every time Mrs. Amory gave way to a new burst of wrath."

"You shall rue this hour, Isabel Stuart!" she exclaimed, "bitterly, and your whole life long shall you repent it."

"She swept up the broad staircase, and my mother drew herself from the stranger's support with a low cry. While they stood trying to recover themselves, my mother's maid came down."

"Madam," she said, "your father commands this gentleman to leave his house."

A few whispered words passed between the three, then the strangers went out of the door, and my mother sunk almost lifeless upon a low seat in the hall. Another servant appeared and said:

"Your father wishes you, madam."

"She rose, shivering with a sudden chill, and went up-stairs, for the first time in her life heedless of my calls and entreaties that she would speak to me."

"After that, I have no distinct recollection. All was confusion—voices talking loudly—my grandfather raving like a madman—Mrs. Amory exultant and fiendish, and my poor mother pale, silent and despairing."

"The next day, my mother took me into the sick man's room; he hardly noticed me, saying to her:

"Isabel, I will never again see your face; but promise me, for my dead wife's sake, that you will live at the Hermitage until your boy is of age—until he is twenty-three years old—twenty-three, remember."

"He was so urgent that she consented; she did not understand his full meaning."

"We left the house, my mother and I, and went to a little village several miles away, and accompanied only by a servant."

"Two days after, there came tidings of my grandfather's death."

"We went back for the last time to Woodbrook."

"Mrs. Amory did not speak or look at my mother. After the funeral, we all assembled in the great drawing-room, and the will was read. Of course I did not then pay attention or understand its contents—but I have learned their import well enough since."

"To make my story plain, I must go back to my mother's girlhood. She and my aunt had been the beautiful but penniless wards of Mr. Amory, although the two were no relation to each other. He had two sons and a step-son; besides those a nephew, who spent much time at the house."

"Both my mother and Louise Gillett loved the latter, but he loved my mother."

"I do not know what arts she employed, but Louise made trouble between the two, parted them, and had him expelled from his uncle's house; for where she hated she was a perfect demon. She married George Amory for his fortune, and my mother became the wife of Walter Stuart from gratitude for his attachment, and she knew that her lover had left her forever, believing her guilty of treachery and wrong."

"The elder brother married, but both he and his wife died soon after their child was born, so he was brought up in his grandfather's house; that boy was Easton Amory. Soon after my birth my father died, and my mother went to live with her father-in-law; and after the death of her husband, Mrs. Amory came there also."

"It appears that my mother and her former suitor discovered the falsehood imposed upon them, and he returned—that was the occasion of the visit of which I have just spoken. I do not know all that happened—my mother never could bear to give me the full details. But I know that Mrs. Amory so far forgot her pride as to throw herself at his feet, and declare her love for him; he rejected her with contempt. It was that slight which rendered her so furious."

"When she left my mother and him together, she went to my grandfather with more falsehoods, and inflamed his mind to such a degree—for he was horribly passionate, childish and easily influenced—that he vowed my mother should promise never to marry his nephew—should ask Mrs. Amory's forgiveness or leave his house forever."

"She did not hesitate. It appears that afterward he repented somewhat; for, as I said, he made her promise, in case she was again left alone, to live at the Hermitage until I was twenty-three."

"The will was opened and read. Mrs. Amory and Easton shared the fortune on one condition, which you shall hear presently. My mother and I were left beggars, although he mentioned his express desire that she should keep her promise and live at the Hermitage, adding a hope that if she did not marry again, her sister-in-law would share with her the property, but making no stipulation which would be at all binding. The idea of any one's trusting to the generosity of an Amory!

"We went away—although a child, I was glad to escape from those gloomy walls and the presence of Mrs. Amory, who sat staring at us with her fiery eyes that were eager still for vengeance.

"Not many months after that time my mother married the lover of her girlish days; all Mrs. Amory's arts had failed at length—they were united.

"There followed for my poor mother a few months of such happiness as she had never known, for her husband was one of the noblest and best of men. I know I loved him from the first, and had he been my own father he could not have treated me with more kindness and affection.

"They were not rich, but wealth could have added little to the happiness of hearts like theirs. It must have been a blessed, holy dream to my mother after all the anguish she had endured, but it was as short-lived as are most visions so heavenly in their glow.

"My step-father was obliged to go to New York upon important business in the height of summer. Only three days after his departure, my mother was summoned—he had been seized with cholera and there was little hope. She reached the place in time to see him die, to catch his last word of tenderness, and then the glory of her life was quenched in a night so terrible that the dawn would never break again.

"He died in her arms, murmuring blessings on her and her child, and once more my mother was a widow—once more we stood helpless and forsaken in the world.

"My mother was heart-broken, but her gentle firmness did not forsake her. She saw what was to be done, and never faltered. She had an annuity of a few hundreds which had been left her by her second husband, and upon that she could exist. We lived upon that pittance—Marianne still clinging to us, and we making our home at the Hermitage. When I entered college, my mother sold some valuable jewels to defray my expenses. I did not know it at the time or I should not have permitted the sacrifice—I was wrong to use that word, my mother never considered it such.

"To-morrow I shall be twenty-three. This place we have so long called home must fall into the hands of our enemies, to be squandered as the rest of their fortune has been. I am glad to leave it; I have never breathed freely within its precincts."

He paused for breath, but I did not speak. I had not interrupted him by a word during his recital, which may appear dull as I have narrated it, but which was rendered very interesting by his manner and energetic speech.

"Are you tired, Madge?" he asked.

"Tired, no! Oh, Walter, your poor mother—that wicked, wicked woman!"

"Now, Madge, for the present! There are certain things you ought to know, although I run the risk of offending you."

"Go on," I said, hastily; "go on."

"There was once a poor girl," he continued, in his soft, pleading voice, "taken by a wealthy family, reared amid luxury, rendered unfit for a contact with the ordinary world, yet with no means provided to preserve her after happiness—treated only as a pretty puppet, to be flung aside the instant she offended or wearied."

"Go on!" I muttered, for he had paused again. There was a choking in my throat, a wild whirl in my brain; I could only repeat my command—"Go on."

"There was a young man—handsome, gifted, fascinating—whom she had known a boy. He was interested in this girl, and by his careless kindness, won perhaps more than her gratitude."

"This is wrong, it is cruel," I cried, feeling the angry blood mount to my face.

"At times one must be cruel in order to be kind," he answered gravely. "This noble girl had no friend honest enough to tell her the truth."

"Utterly selfish had he been from his earliest youth. His recklessness led to his expulsion from college—he was a gambler and a spendthrift. Although still young, he had wasted almost the whole of a princely fortune. Should not one interested in that young girl warn her? Madge, that man is Easton Amory!"

He had spoken so rapidly that I had found no time to interrupt him—indeed, passion so choked me that for a few instants I had not the power to speak. At last I broke out:

"You have lied—you are a base, false coward."

"I have spoken the truth, Madge; oh, be warned in time!"

"I will not hear a word more; leave me instantly!"

"I tell you, Madge, by the terms of his grandfather's will he is forced to marry his cousin Louise, or both forfeit the estate—at least what there is left of it."

"There is not a word of truth in your whole story," I exclaimed. "I would not believe you though you took a thousand oaths! Leave this place, sir—go at once!"

"Whom have we here?" called out an angry voice.

Before I could speak, Easton Amory ran down the slope and stood beside me. Walter Stuart rose, pale but very calm.

"My worshipful cousin, as I live!" exclaimed Easton. "Trespasser! I'll have you driven away like a dog if you come here again."

"Beat him, Easton," I exclaimed, quite beside myself with rage; "kill him—anything! He has told lies—lies of you, so good, so kind!"

Amory turned toward him with a furious gesture, but Walter Stuart waved him back with a calm smile.

"We will not quarrel," he said, quietly; "you know that I have spoken only the truth. For that poor girl's sake I have watched you; I know you thoroughly; I have warned her; if she will not heed me, God help her, I can do nothing more."

Amory sprang toward him with a curse. Stuart kept his ground firmly, but I stepped between.

"No quarrel," I sobbed, for now I was weeping convulsively; "you must not quarrel."

"We shall not," replied Walter. "Easton Amory, I am leaving this place forever; but before I go, deny, if you can, that you have deceived this poor child. You are obliged to marry your cousin; you dare not deny it."

I looked up with sudden desperation.

"Say that it is not so," I groaned; "if you would not kill me, say that it is not true."

"He cannot!" returned Stuart; "he dare not! Remember what I have said—farewell."

He sprang over the wall, but cast back one parting glance.

"Poor Madge," I heard him murmur: "Poor little Madge!"

I sat down upon the ground, weak and faint now that the excitement was past, and weeping such bitter tears as had never before fallen from my eyes.

Easton's embrace recalled me to myself; he entreated me to be calm—to forget it all.

"Is it true?" I asked; "is it true? only tell me."

"Such was the will," he replied; "but I have no intention of complying with it; I would be a beggar first! Did you think I could give you up, Madge?"

"No, no! I knew you could not be so cruel."

"I fairly hate Louise; you know that I love you better than the whole world, better than life itself."

"You would not deceive me; you would not—"

"Do you believe the lies of that wretch?" he interrupted, sternly.

"Have you no faith in me—cannot you trust me—is your love less than mine?"

"No, no, Easton! I would not believe an angel who spoke against you. I have nothing but you in all the world—no one else cares for me—you saved me from a life of misery. Is not my life yours? do with it what you will."

"My brave, my beautiful Madge!"

The tears I shed then were sweet and soothing; they were shed upon his bosom. While I lay clasped to his breast, there was a quick step upon the grass; we turned, and there—her face so distorted with rage that she looked like an evil spirit suddenly roused from a darker world to confront us, clenching her hands while her eyes fairly blazed like sheet-lightning—stood Mrs. Amory.

We both started back—there was something fairly appalling in her look; one who had never seen her except with the smiling face she wore to the world, would never have recognized the beautiful woman in the livid, breathless fury who had so unexpectedly broken in upon our wild happiness.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PARTING.

I HAVE no distinct recollection of the occurrences of the next few moments. I remained perfectly helpless, listening to the terrible language uttered by my companions, as they stood reckless, mad, yet alike in their passion.

I was not at all afraid, only weak, and at length I struggled up from the ground where I had sunk. Mrs. Amory seized me by the arm and shook it violently, leaving the mark of her fingers upon the flesh for days after.

"Devil!" she shrieked rather than spoke. "Little nameless, homeless wretch! Is this the reward of my kindness—this the gratitude I receive for all that I have done? But you shall be flung out into the world to starve—die—what you will! Start now! here you shall not stay!"

"Stop, madam, are you mad?" exclaimed Easton, pushing her roughly away. "Take care! you know that you have in me a will equal to your own. If you send that girl from here, I go, too, and you and your daughter will see me no more."

She was silent for a little while; but Easton could always subdue her. She gnawed her lip with impotent fury, made a violent effort to recover herself, and then spoke more quietly:

"What is to be done? Certainly things cannot go on at this rate; I will not permit it! Is my daughter to be insulted before her very face for that upstart—that beggar?"

"Be careful!" he hissed from between his teeth.

"Be careful."

"You may be fearless, Easton Amory, so am I. There must be a settlement between us. Thanks to your reckless life, we are almost ruined."

"Thank yourself," he retorted; "your gambling debts will more than cover the estate that comes to us to-morrow; besides, it is already disposed of."

She grew very pale, and began to tremble.

"You do not mean it," she said; "you have not dared to do it."

"Not dared! Do you know me no better than that? There is nothing I fear."

"You may the law," she returned, with angry vehemence.

"Let me see you call it to your assistance," and he laughed insultingly. "It is you who would not dare. I tell you, you and your daughter may be

the beggars instead of this girl; insult her again at your peril!"

If a look could have killed, Easton Amory would never have moved from that spot where he stood; but, bold as she was, Mrs. Amory cared for her own interests. After that first burst of rage, her selfishness restored her calmness.

"Let that girl go away," she said; "you and I must talk without a witness."

"Oh, you feel that," he replied, laughing again; "you feel that, do you?"

Mrs. Amory clenched her hands until the cords stood out upon her wrists stiff and rigid, but she did not answer him.

"Go to the house, Madge," she said to me, in a choked voice; "and as you value your life, keep silence."

"Yes, go, Madge," Easton added, when I paused, and at his bidding I left them.

Of course I never learned what passed during that interview; it must have been a terrible one.

I returned to the house, walking slowly, and tottering like one stunned by a blow. I had no strength left. The reaction of that excitement, almost frenzy, was so fearful that I was weak as if I had just arisen from a sick bed.

"Are you ill?" the housekeeper asked, as I met her in the hall; but I hurried on without a word, and I heard her whisper to a housemaid:

"I believe my soul that girl is crazy!"

"She was always queer," was the reply; but I went on without appearing to have heard their impertinent words.

In the quiet of my chamber I sat down and tried to think, but my head was dizzy and a deathly sickness unstrung every nerve. I must have remained there for several hours; no one disturbed me—apparently no one remembered my existence.

At last I went out into the hall—the confinement of my chamber seemed choking me. It was dark, but the lamps were not lighted; the whole house appeared to be in confusion; I could not tell whether it was really so or only my troubled imagination.

As I stood in the hall, Louise came out of her room, beautifully dressed, as she always was of an evening. She went by me without speaking, humming a low tune. A moment after, she returned.

"Mamma wishes you to go to your room," she said; "and you are to stay there until she chooses to call you; be good enough to remember that."

I obeyed without a word of reply; I would not sufficiently gratify her petty malice to utter a syllable of expostulation. She darted a look of hatred at me, muttering:

"I will find some means of bringing down your pride before we are much older, or my name is not Louise Amory."

I laughed at scornfully and sneeringly as I could. The sound of that bitter merriment enraged Louise almost beyond endurance.

"Little mulatto!" she hissed, "I would like to take you South and sell you for a slave; and I will, too. I believe you are a negro—I do, indeed!"

I laughed again, entered my room, and deliberately closed the door in her face, leaving her to her own reflections. I heard her fairly stamp her foot with passion and mutter further threats as she walked away through the darkness, but I had no time to spend in considering her anger.

I saw no one for many hours. I had eaten nothing since morning, but I felt no hunger—a morsel of food would have suffocated me.

I sat with my hands clasped over my knee, waiting, listening, feeling that something was about to happen—longing to have the blow fall, that I might know at once the worst and prepare myself to meet it.

There I sat, hearing only the monotonous ticking of a clock in the hall, till the measured sound almost drove me out of my senses; it sounded like a human voice mocking my agony. I longed to rouse myself to give a cry that would bring the whole household around me, for my brain grew so disordered that I seemed to see dim shapes starting up amid the gloom—fierce, angry faces mowing and jeering at me as they passed. I heard a voice in the gallery that I believe would have roused me from the delirium of a fever. It was only a whisper, but to me it sounded loud and distinct.

"Here I am, Easton; here I am!" I exclaimed, opening the door with all speed. He came toward me, embraced me hurriedly, and said: "I leave here instantly—start to-morrow morning for Europe; when I return every thing will be well."

"Going!" I repeated, "going!" stunned by the suddenness of this last and greatest blow.

"I shall not be absent long; believe me, Madge, it is better so; only have patience—only wait."

At that moment Louise's voice was heard in the lower hall. Easton gave me one kiss and hurried away; then I stood in the gloom utterly bereft and alone.

"Going! going!" my lips kept mechanically repeating, until it seemed to me that another voice took up the complaint and mimicked the distress of my own.

The wind surged up with a low wail from the depths of the forest as the hours wore on, and I sat in my chamber keeping a terrible vigil. There was a leaden weight on heart and brain, pressing closer and closer until there came a paroxysm of pain so violent that my over-wrought nerves could bear no more; there was a sensation through my whole body as if life itself were forsaking me—then I remember nothing further.

When I returned to consciousness I was lying upon the floor, and the cheerful morning light shone in at the windows. I could not stir, and I saw that my dress and the carpet around me were wet with blood. I tried to think, to wonder what could be the

matter, but I was incapable of even that slight mental effort, and again I fainted.

When I came to myself I was still alone, weak as before, but free from pain. I knew then that I had broken a blood-vessel, but I did not feel afraid—something told me it had saved my life.

I suppose my absence at last attracted attention, for about midday Mrs. Amory's maid opened the door; but with one look of horror toward the place where I lay, ran out, screaming:

"She is dead! she is dead!"

Her cries brought the whole household to my chamber—even Mrs. Amory came. They raised me and laid me on the bed. Common humanity, or at least the presence of those around, compelled the woman to send for a physician, although I do not imagine that she cared particularly whether my life was saved or not.

The doctor came, applied such remedies as were necessary, and ordered that I should have the most perfect repose. The rupture was an unimportant one, he said, caused by some intense mental excitement.

They washed the blood from my face, changed my clothes, and left me alone; for that I was grateful.

Mrs. Amory came close to my bed before she went out, and whispered:

"Madge, you have been an ungrateful, wicked girl, but I shall not send you away if you promise never to mention what happened yesterday."

With those words she left me, but the pardon she so curtly accorded was contradicted by the flash in her eyes. I knew that it was only fear of Easton which had induced her to treat me so leniently.

I had determined to remain there no longer. As soon as I was able, I would leave the house forever. That thought was strong in my soul. I cared little where I went or what became of me; my only wish was to get away from every sight or sound of the past—to leave behind those who only recalled my desolation and added to the pain of the miserable destiny forced upon me. I had no hope left, no strength; I would gladly have turned upon my pillow and died, but that could not be.

I did not attempt to solace myself with the thought of again meeting Easton Amory; something told me that we were parted forever. My love seemed to increase with the death-like agony I endured. I believed nothing they had spoken against him—either his lying cousin or his false-hearted aunt.

I lay in bed for many days, suffering nothing, but dreadfully weak. At length, one afternoon, I was able to leave my chamber. I went out into the hall; my steps were trembling and uncertain, but my strong will would not yield—it overmastered the flesh and gave me power to do that which I had wished.

I went to the picture-gallery. Easton's portrait hung there.

I can give no account of the hour I passed in that room. Even now I dare not brush away the ashes that have gathered over the grave of that time, and look beneath. I will not murmur and complain; let the agony of that season rest between God and the tortured heart which seemed too utterly crushed and broken ever to heal.

I left that gallery as a mourner might leave a tomb—calm enough, quiet and still, neither weeping nor lamenting, but altogether desolate. I closed the door softly, as if I feared that a sound would evoke spirits in the place, and went my way.

I chose to go down stairs, and I went. I did not think of Mrs. Amory's anger; I should not have stopped for that. I felt very calm, but stony and cold, as if my whole being had suddenly changed to ice.

Louise I had not seen since the day of Easton's departure; she never came near me when I was ill. I would not have desired her presence; but many a night had I watched by her bed, listening to her childish complaints, tending and caring for her, only to be chidden and blamed for my pains.

CHAPTER XIII.

TEMPEST AND SHIPWRECK.

I stood in the lower hall, near the entrance to the library, the door of which was ajar. I heard Mrs. Amory's voice in sharp, eager questionings, and that of Mr. Thornton, her man of business, in measured response.

I do not know why I remained. Their conversation had no interest for me, and I would have scorned the meanness of playing the listener, but I caught Easton's name—that name which was always sounding in my ear, and it had a spell that chained me to the spot.

"There must have been knavery somewhere," exclaimed Mrs. Amory, passionately, "and it shall be my business to find out where it lies."

"Very near your own door," replied the lawyer, firmly. "The course of mad extravagance you have been running during the last fourteen years would have beggared a prince, and, since his boyhood, your nephew has even surpassed you in his recklessness. I have warned and expostulated, but in vain."

"I do not comprehend," she muttered.

"Only a fortnight ago," pursued Mr. Thornton, "I was obliged to raise forty thousand dollars for you, by disposing of stock at a great loss. You know better than myself where it all went."

"It is your business to supply the money mine to dispose of it as I see fit," she replied, with her old haughtiness.

"Possibly, madam; but when the supplies are no longer forthcoming, who are you to blame but yourself? Your nephew's debts amount to an incredible sum. When he became of age, he was forced, in a measure, to satisfy his creditors."

"I know nothing about those things," she replied, impatiently; "I can't be bored with such talk. Get me the money I require without further contention. I have heard nothing but excuses and complaints during the last three years."

"Madam," answered Mr. Thornton, almost solemnly, "to save my soul I could not raise you a dollar."

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed, with a sudden passion, which was a mingling of anger and fright.

"I mean"—and even that callous man of business was so moved that his voice trembled a little—"I mean that you are ruined!"

I saw Mrs. Amory fall back in her chair—she had not fainted—but she was incapable of speech, as that fearful truth for the first time forced itself upon her mind.

"I have faithfully performed my trust," continued Mr. Thornton, "but my efforts were unavailing. You have flung away an immense fortune—you and Easton Amory. You have rendered your name a by-word for extravagance. Now that everything is lost, now that the ruin I pointed out long since as close at your door has come upon you, do not blame me for your own folly and sin."

He turned to leave the room, but that proud woman, utterly humbled, besought him to remain, wringing her hands and moaning piteously.

"Is there no help—none? There must be something left! Why not sell the Hermitage?—it is ours now."

You forget—your nephew has disposed of it—some compact between yourselves."

She motioned him to cease, while a spasm of pain contracted her forehead.

"Is there nothing, nothing?"

"A few thousands, madam, may be saved from the wreck, but to you it will seem absolute beggary. I cannot advise you—I have so often done it in vain. This house and all it contains must go. Your town house has long been covered with mortgages—a fortune gone by those speculations in which you and your nephew engaged against all advice—you see to what you must look forward."

Mrs. Amory gave a groan. I never saw such suffering and despair upon any face as there was on hers.

"Believe me, madam," he said, "I would not appear unnecessarily harsh, but you have so often of late insinuated things against my honor, that I am bound to clear myself. You can examine the accounts—they are all open to you; study them and be satisfied."

She made no reply; did not appear conscious that he had addressed her; but those white lips muttered:

"My daughter, my poor daughter!"

"She will have something when she comes of age. You remember by her grandfather's will there are twenty thousand dollars left her."

"Can't we use it now?" she asked, eagerly, seizing the first desperate hope.

"Impossible! No one can touch it until she is twenty-one. It would only be a drop in the ocean now. By that time she may have grown wiser and better able to appreciate money than she is at present."

"Then there is no hope—"

"None!"

"There must be some way—put things off—we shall contrive—"

"Every resource has been exhausted! Madam, I must repeat it—you are ruined."

He turned for the second time to go, and she did not attempt to detain him. He passed me without a word, nor did I notice him; I was wholly occupied in watching Mrs. Amory. She sat there so pale, so frightfully still, that I was afraid her reason would give way.

I went into the room, fell on my knees by her, took her cold hand in mine, and besought her not to despair.

She looked at me with a sort of smile.

"Go," she said, "leave me as all the rest will. I can do nothing for you now—I am a beggar. The whole world will know it soon."

I did not speak; she seemed rather talking to herself than addressing me.

"Beggared, and by my own madness! As for that boy, I could curse him, but I dare not! He must come back—yes, that will be best."

She paused, for the first time appearing to remember that I was present.

"Why are you here?" she asked, angrily. "I don't want you—go away! I will not have you exulting at my misery."

I was weeping unrestrainedly, and as she felt the tears fall hot upon her hands, she looked at them and me with a wild, incredulous wonder.

"Why don't you go?" she continued, in an altered voice; "I can help you no longer—I have no home—no friends."

"Neither had I," was my answer, "until God sent you. Mrs. Amory, I owe every thing to your kindness; oh, don't think I forget it! While I have two hands, and strength or life left, I will work for you. Hear what I say—try to understand me—I will never desert you—I will work for you always."

She was so crushed that my words softened her at once. She laid her hand on my head, and for the first time wept freely.

"I did not think there was so much goodness in any human being," she said.

"I belong to you," I replied; "I am only doing my duty."

"But what are we to do?" she moaned, as the terrible truth occurred to her. "Who will tell Louise?"

"I will, madam."

"My poor, poor child! Where can we go—what can we do?"

"I will settle every thing," I replied; "only lie down and rest while I go and speak with Mr. Thornton."

At length I persuaded her to go to her room, gave her some quieting drops I knew she had been in the habit of taking, and went away to find Mr. Thornton. We had a long conversation, and, when it was concluded, he said:

"You are a true woman! Go on and do not fear—God will help you!"

That was new language to me; nobody but the clergyman had ever talked in that way! I had little time to reflect upon these words, yet they came constantly back to me in the midst of my trials, and gave me new courage when I faltered.

During the following week I was busier than ever before in my life. I had Mrs. Amory to sustain, Louise to look after—for when she heard the tidings, she went into nervous spasms, and was really ill. I went several times to the city, saw Mr. Thornton, arranged, with his assistance, an abode for the present, removed thither such valuables as I might, and at last all was ready.

There were many executions in the house, and magnificent as every thing was, the lawyer assured me it would be a mere nothing toward satisfying the creditors.

I was not confused by the suddenness with which all this had come upon me—I was firmer than ever before. New faculties seemed to rouse themselves in my nature—energies of which I had had no perception—strength, nerve, power to manage—all that was necessary in such a time.

Mrs. Amory could offer no counsel—did not wish to be consulted—she left every thing to me; and the most pitiable thing of all was to see that proud woman so utterly prostrated, leaning so wholly upon the girl she had considered as little better than the dust beneath her feet.

When all was over, there remained to Mrs. Amory an income of a few hundred dollars, but to her it appeared the most absolute poverty.

The day before that appointed for the sale, we all left Woodbrook forever.

It was now midsummer, and Mr. Thornton and I decided that it would be better for them to remain in the country until autumn; after that, it was necessary for the furtherance of my plans that we should reside in New York.

It would be useless to enter into the details of the few following weeks. We were established in a little house within a few hours' ride of the city. The dwelling was of the plainest description; yet, to many, it would doubtless have seemed a comfortable home; but to those petted, enervated creatures it was revoltingly miserable; and even I had become so enfeebled by luxury and idleness, that the privations were often hard to bear.

I had made arrangements for taking rooms in the city on the first of September. Mr. Thornton had promised to obtain for me a class in drawing. Upon that, and my skill in needlework, we must in a great measure rely, since Mrs. Amory's little pittance would not be sufficient for our wants.

I knew that Louise would be of no assistance. She neither could nor would teach or lift her hands to do anything useful. She would do nothing but rail at her mother and Easton, varying her programme by unlimited condemnation of everything I said or did.

Mrs. Amory was at length seized with a nervous fever, and there was no one to take care of her but me, as Louise declared herself ill also, remained in her room, and did not even see her mother. I had to prepare and carry up her meals to her—so she bade me—commanding me as if I had been a servant. Mrs. Amory pined, and not unnaturally, for luxuries which to her had become absolute necessities—but where to obtain them?

I did the best I could, and there the matter had to rest—no, it did no do that, for I was forced to listen to ceaseless complaints from both.

I know that Mrs. Amory wrote many times to Easton, but I concluded that the letters never reached him, as they remained unanswered; and I was certain that he would not refuse to assist them out of what he had left, if he knew the strait into which they had fallen.

The weeks wore on, and autumn came. We removed to the city about the middle of September. The rooms Mr. Thornton had found for us were in a small house, on a retired but respectable street. My helpless charges pronounced it a vile den, and on the first night sobbed themselves to sleep. I thought of Paradise Square, and was grateful for the roof which sheltered us, and which, with other inmates, might have made a comfortable home.

I found my pupils awaiting me; and the income I received was reasonably good. I performed the household duties, and procured a little girl to wait upon Mrs. Amory. Louise lay in bed from one day's end to another, fretting, and reading trashy novels; but I never attempted to find any fault with her.

I worked hard, growing thin and pale; but I did not heed that. All day long I was engaged with my classes. Before I went out I prepared their breakfast, and cooked their dinner when I returned; and all the evening I plied my needle—often working until daylight when Mrs. Amory's fancies brought some extra expense upon us.

Mrs. Amory had many beautiful dresses and jewels left, of course—these were gradually disposed of. It was hard to bear with Louise; she abused me constantly, as if I had been the cause of her ruin. I never replied to her taunts—my contempt for her really gave way to pity for her folly and helplessness. She seemed to hate me worse than ever, now that they were, in a manner, dependent upon me, and I never went in her sight without receiving a

volley of ill-natured speeches. Mrs. Amory never was harsh to me, but she would sit and look at me so hopelessly, asking if I meant her to starve or beg, that it was quite as bad to get along with her.

The winter came, and of course our expenses increased. Truth to say, I had undertaken a great deal. But I did not falter—not once did I feel a regret or an inclination to retract from my resolve to take care of them. I worked day and night—painted—sewed—made fancy articles—wrote sketches—did everything, anything, by which I could eke out our little income.

Louise might have turned some of her accomplishments to use, but she would not. Once Mrs. Amory did knit a purse, but she vowed it would kill her to think of selling and receiving money for it, although it had always been a favorite amusement with her. Louise teased for all manner of useless things, and, whenever it was possible, her doting mother would gratify her, and, I never complained.

We lived in this way for a year, but alas, growing poorer constantly. Easton did not return, and many times Mrs. Amory would exclaim passionately against his neglect.

I knew well he would never marry Louise, and I exulted in the thought—I had not been human else. They had driven him away from me, but they had lost him likewise. I did not allow my thoughts to dwell upon him; had I done so, I should have sunk down helpless and despairing.

I worked, worked, seeing no hope in the future, looking at those two growing daily more helpless, and wondering how much longer my strength would serve to their support. I was not as strong nor as able to labor as when the year began. I had not been accustomed to work, and such confinement, such ceaseless toil, is very wearing.

I did the washing and ironing, added to all the rest, for the girl was kept constantly occupied by Mrs. Amory or Louise, and besides, she was an ill-trained creature, willing enough, but unable to do any thing well.

About this time Mr. Thornton died suddenly. I had lost my only friend! My class dwindled to a small number, and I found it impossible to procure more scholars. I struggled along as best I might, trying to be hopeful and serene, for with the least appearance of gloom on my part, Mrs. Amory was in despair, and would take to her bed for days.

I am lingering over this portion of my history longer than will be interesting. Let me hasten on.

I said that we lived there for a year. The winter again came on—a cold, severe one it was.

"There are no coals," said the girl, one morning, as I was preparing to go out, "and the fire is low."

I had not a cent of money. I never could ask Mrs. Amory to dispose of any of her dresses, although she often did it, but never for such things. I stood perplexed and troubled, with a sharper pang of anxiety than ever before.

"Shure, and it's hard for ye, miss," said the pitying attendant.

These were the first kind words I had heard in months, and the tears came into my eyes.

"Hush, Bridget," I said; "I can't be pitied! We must do some way."

I bethought me of the gold cross I had worn since I left Nan Briggs. It was like tearing my heart out to part with the sole relic of my dead mother, but there was no alternative. I removed the chain from my neck, kissed it, wept over it, but, in the end, Bridget was sent with it to the pawnbroker's. It was a valuable ornament, and I knew that she could obtain sufficient on it to purchase the coals.

That was the last sacrifice I was called upon to make for those women. I had now to learn what thanks I was to receive for the good I had tried to do them.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SOLITARY STRUGGLE.

A FEW evenings after the sale of my cross, I returned home weary, dispirited, and with a nervous pain in my head that almost drove me out of my senses.

Bridget met me at the door, exclaiming:

"Great news, miss; ye're all rich again!"

She always chose to consider me as one of Mrs. Amory's family, although Louise frequently told her that I was no better than a servant.

"What do you mean, Bridget?" I asked, stopping in the narrow passage.

"Mane?—what I say, to be sure. A gintleman came in a grand carriage, and they are both gone with him. I have the caird, and we are to go."

I thought she meant Easton, and grew sick and faint.

"Who was it?" I demanded.

"Sorra one o' me knows."

"Was he young?" I asked, impatiently.

"No, indeed; ould and gray, and cross top o' that. But glad enough they were—acting like two loonatics—the young one singing and dancing like mad, and the ould one not much better."

"Where have they gone?"

"Shure, there's the caird; it'll tell better nor me, perticier as I don't know."

I took it, and read the address of one of the most fashionable hotels in the city. Under it was scribbled, in Mrs. Amory's hand: "Come at once, my good Madge."

Even then she remembered the distinction between us—prosperity had changed her instantly.

I went to the hotel, accompanied by Bridget, and was shown into a parlor, where Mrs. Amory sat with Louise and an old gentleman, whom the former introduced as her uncle, Mr. Forrester.

"Well, Madge, we are off to New Orleans," were almost the first words Mrs. Amory spoke; "so make as much haste as you can."

"My niece feels quite obliged to you for your little exertions, Miss Madge," said the old gentleman, pompously.

"But where would she have been but for mamma's charity?" exclaimed Louise.

"True," said Mr. Forrester, taking a pinch of snuff with the air of a marquis of the olden regime; "very true."

"You are to go with us," said Mrs. Amory; "you must never leave me, Madge; when Louise goes I shall be quite alone."

But, to their unbounded astonishment, I refused. I had eaten the bread of independence; although hard to earn, it was sweet to the taste; never again would I live upon the bounty of any human being.

"Not go?" exclaimed Mrs. Amory. "What will you do?"

"Work," I said, with a smile.

"One would think you had had enough of that."

"Why, mamma," said Louise, "it is her nature; she feels most at home in her present situation. Let her alone."

"A strange taste!" ejaculated Mr. Forrester, quite red in the face at my impertinence in refusing their offer; and he withdrew his attention from me altogether, and began talking in a low tone with Louise, while Mrs. Amory continued urging her request.

"You must go, Madge. I expect you always to live with me."

"If I were necessary to your comfort, madam, I would never leave you; but you have recovered position and wealth—you need me no longer."

"But you must have a home."

"My own exertions and industry must provide me one then. I cannot longer go through life dependent upon others. It is my duty to work, and I mean to do it."

"But I am accustomed to you, Madge. I need you."

"Oh, madam," I said, bitterly, "there will be many a negro in your new home more gentle-handed and serviceable than I."

She blushed a little at her own selfishness, and, like many another, took refuge in anger.

"Then you refuse to go?"

"You must excuse me—I cannot."

"It is your own fault. Whatever happens, you will have only yourself to blame."

"I should never dream of accusing any other."

"Well, it's very ungrateful, Madge. I shall always think so."

"I am sorry, madam. If the time should ever come that you required me—if you were sick or in trouble, I would come to you gladly."

"Oh, thank you; it is not likely; my troubles, I fancy, are over now," and she drew herself up with all her old dignity—"quite over."

She grew more offended as the idea of her new state came clearly to her mind, and she ceased combating my determination.

I was roused to listen to Mr. Forrester's conversation by a remark he made in answer to something Louise had said.

"I believe," he exclaimed, "that in spite of his fine talk and manners, this Easton is a scoundrel."

Neither Louise nor her mother said a word in contradiction; they were careful of their interests; but I turned on him at once.

"It is very gentlemanly, sir, to condemn a man of whom you know nothing. Easton Amory is much more incapable of doing a mean thing than one who would speak of a stranger as you have done."

The old gentleman and Mrs. Amory were stricken dumb at this outburst, but Louise laughed.

"What a champion!" said she. "Easton ought to be grateful! I wish he heard the little Gipsy, as he always called you."

"I wish he did hear me," I retorted, "that he might learn to treat his relatives with the contempt they deserve." I grew pale with excitement, as I went on. "If you have no affection in you—if the ties of kindred are of no value in your eyes, I would conceal the fact! I knew that you were utterly heartless and despicably ridiculous, but I never accused you of such miserable meanness."

I had borne much from her, and for once was determined to free my mind. The little viper was thoroughly enraged, but her venom had no effect.

"One would think you were in love with him, and you are! What impudence, to be sure—as if he would look twice at you."

"I do love him," I replied, fearlessly; "I am not ashamed to own it; and he loves me as much as he despises you. He would sooner marry a beggar than you—"

"Madge, Madge," interrupted Mrs. Amory, "do you not know? have I not told you—"

Louise sprang forward—put her hand over her mother's mouth and prevented her concluding her sentence.

"If you tell her, I will never speak to you till the day of my death!" she cried. "I do not choose her to know—wait, wait! Well, Miss Paradise," she continued, addressing me by her favorite name, "have you any more delicate avowals to make?"

"None—I will waste no words upon you. We are parting, doubtless forever, unless you should again become poor; in that case, Louise, return to the outcast, the vagrant, and she will again provide you with a home."

"Stop, Madge," said Mrs. Amory, as I turned to leave the room. "Do not go hastily! Think of what I say—Louise will leave me soon—stay with me. What will become of you here? You cannot live! Mercy on us, child, you must be mad to hesitate even for a moment!"

"Madam," I said, respectfully, "I owe you a great deal—I am sorry to appear ungrateful, but I cannot go."

"Not ungrateful, Madge," she replied, perhaps a little touched as she recalled the past year, "not ungrateful but blind to your own interests. You have been a good girl—I will say that, and worked like a little slave. Come with me, Madge!"

Still I said no, no! I would have died a thousand deaths rather than have remained longer with that soulless, mindless girl!

"It is much better as it is," said Mr. Forrester, with stately reproof; "the young person is above her station; let obstinacy and self-will take their own course."

I did not even by a look show that I had heard his words, but bidding Mrs. Amory farewell, left the apartment, followed by Bridget, who, from the corner where she had ensconced herself, had been a silent but attentive listener during the whole scene.

"Sure, ye did the wise thing, miss," said she, when we had regained the street; "ye'd better work the fingers off ye than live that way."

I fully agreed with her; any trials or sufferings would be easier to bear than those which must await me in the home they offered.

The next day I went out as usual to my duties, and when I returned, Bridget handed me a note—it was from Louise.

"We leave here this morning; mamma is quite sick, and desired me to send you money to pay the rent and the servant; but I shall do no such thing—if you want it you must humble your pride enough to come after it."

That was a severe blow! We owed a quarter's rent, and poor Bridget had not been paid for months. But I had borne too much to give way now.

I sold the furniture to the best advantage possible—it was little enough I could get, heaven knows—settled the rent and gave up the house. The kind, devoted servant would have refused the money due her, but I insisted upon her receiving it, and then we separated. Truly that parting was a bitter one; I was leaving the last human being who cared whether I lived or died. With such valuables as I still possessed, I betook myself to a little room in a street near by, less decent and cleanly, and in a dark, gloomy tenement-house.

I was alone—forsaken by the whole world; but my courage did not desert me. It was not very long till spring. I thought that if I could struggle on until the warm weather came, I should do much better.

I taught daily and worked as hard as before, but could feel how my strength went from me, though there was no one to observe or care. My pupils took no notice of my appearance; indeed, the greater number appeared to consider me only as a sort of human machinery. Their slights troubled me no more than Louise's insults had done; I was accustomed to such treatment.

The spring came, bright and beautiful even in those foul, gloomy streets—came and passed, and the hot, enervating mid-summer took its place.

The last of my scholars forsook me. I could obtain no more, and now my only resource was my needle. I found it necessary to go to the shops and procure work, no matter what the kind might be. I painted several little pictures from copies I had made of old paintings in Mrs. Amory's house; but finding it impossible to dispose of them, thought it useless to waste more time or materials.

I tried to bring my old love of writing to my aid. I sent several little stories to different papers. Sometimes they were published; but when I wrote for the pay the answer usually was that they never gave any thing for first articles.

Before winter came, I was obliged to exchange my habitation for a much poorer one in a still darker and more pent-up portion of the city.

I began to think, with unutterable loathing, of Nan Briggs and Paradise Square! Was my destiny, after all, to be consummated in that horrible spot where I began to know something of life? Rapidly I was being pushed further down, down every day!

My hopefulness was gone—my courage began to grow weak—my soul sickened within me!

I used to sit at the little window, occupied with my work, and look through the miserable streets which I knew led to Paradise Square, and think how soon I should be compelled to tread them. I wondered if Nan Briggs could be living still, and what she would say were I to return to her helpless, starving, and ask her for protection.

Sometimes I laughed at the unutterable horror of the thought, then would shudderingly check the hollow sound, fearing that I was already going mad.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SPECTER'S APPROACH.

THE winter was upon me, cold, bleak, terrible, and in its train came a gaunt figure, approaching nearer and nearer—it was starvation!

I had no money, and no means by which to procure any. Some time before, I had seen prizes for successful stories offered by some newspaper. I had written and sent one; but since then I had heard nothing concerning it. For several weeks I called daily at the office, but always received the same answer: the rewards had not been distributed.

At last the men grew tired of the sight of me—they had always been sufficiently uncivil—and bade me leave my address instead of coming any more; they would write to me if my story was among those that were accepted.

I had some feelings of pride left, and they rose bitterly against the thought of revealing my abode; but what had I to do with pride! After the first moment of hesitation, I wrote my address upon a scrap of paper, and gave it to them. When the men had read it they looked at one another and laughed, but I went away heedless of their sneers.

So I sat in my garret-room and waited, waited—but there was no change for the better. I was ill for some time—not with any actual ailment, but body and mind had become so completely prostrated that for days I could not rise from my bed; there I lay upon that wretched pallet, with no one to care for me, unless it might have been that the angels looked down upon me from a clear spot I could see in the sky, and took note of my sufferings.

I will not describe that garret where I lived! I tried to make it neat; indeed, there was no reason why it should not have been; there was nothing in it but my miserable bed, a single chair, and a broken table propped up against the wall.

While I was too weak to sit up much, there came one day a tap at my door, and, without bidding the landlady entered—a tall, gaunt, hard-featured, bad-looking woman as one could fear to see.

She stared at me for a moment, and I turned my eyes away, too feeble and wretched to care what her errand might be.

"Sick, eh?" she grumbled, while her sharp, green eyes wandered to and fro about the room, "and sick folks can't work, and them as can't pay must trot."

"What do you want?" I asked.

"Want, indeed—he! he! how innocent we be to be sure! Why, I want a week's rent—just have the goodness to go to your money-chest and fork it over."

I was speechless! I had but a few pennies in the world, and where to obtain more I did not know.

"Wal," she continued, apparently enjoying my mute distress, "what's the matter—got no stuff, eh?"

"None," I replied, desperately; "I cannot pay you this morning—wait until I am better."

"Wait, indeed! You don't ketch this child with no such chaff—no, indeed! I'll have my money afore I leave this room."

"But I haven't any!"

"That's neither here nor there—you've got what'll answer jest as well."

"What, what?" I asked, eagerly.

"Wal, there's that pictur'—tain't worth much, to be sure, but I'll take it; mabby I can get a few shillings for it."

She pointed to a painting I had not disposed of at the pawnbroker's—one of the best copies I had ever made, and worth much more than the paltry sum required to pay her rent. I was too weak to contend with her; she must have it, or I should be driven into the streets.

"Take it," I said; "do take it and go."

She watched me for an instant longer with her horrible eyes, gave a low chuckle, and taking up the picture went slowly out of the room, looking back at me to the last with some dreadful thought in her brutal features which I could not understand.

The next day I was able to go out, although still very feeble. I had not a mouthful of food, and something must be obtained. I made a bundle of such decent clothes as still remained to me, and went to the nearest pawnbroker's shop. The amount I received was enough to last me for some time to come. I returned to the old woman, and offered to pay the rent in money if she would give me back my picture.

"No, indeed," said she, with a grin, "I ain't so green as all that comes to! That 'ere picture's mine, honey—just go along about your business, and mind tain't none of it going toward next week's rent, neither!"

It would have been the height of folly to have disputed her determination, and I wisely left her to herself.

I had now food, and my appetite returned. I devoured ravenously the provisions I had bought. The bread was dry and black, the dried fish moldy and bitter; but never during my past life of luxury had any delicacies tasted so sweet to me as those coarse morsels. When my meal was over, I lay down and slept; I had nothing else to do, and I felt tired after my walk.

But to linger over these details will do no good. If it could serve to render the rich more thoughtful of those around them, I would describe that time with minute fidelity. But the sympathies of the world are not so easily excited; it sees nothing of such misery, it cannot be but there is some way for people to find work if they want it, and those who will not labor deserve no food.

So let me hasten on—doubtless there are many who would not credit my story if I revealed the suffering of that season. But let such go down into the alleys and by-ways—look into the loathsome dens reeking with human beings—gaze on the miserable children—the wild-eyed women—the haggard, despairing men, and then say, if they can, that there is no truth in these pages. Let them go in the cold winter and stand on the hearth where no fire burns, where a mother and her helpless babes are crouched, and then tell me these things are too horrible for belief.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE DEPTHS.

AGAIN I was without money! The last few shillings I possessed went to satisfy that avaricious old woman, and as she left me she shook her head significantly, and pointed toward the street—the foul, loathsome street, where the wretched walked, the haggard, lost and miserable congregated.

"You'll have a wide home very soon," she said, with her frightful chuckle, while her green eyes dilated, "a wide home; you needn't pay no rent there—it's free quarters—free quarters."

I had a few trifles left—they must go; food was sweet, and I began to have dreadful cravings night

and day. My constant reflection was of something to eat.

It was strange how little I thought of Louise or Mrs. Amory—they had gone so entirely out of my life that even their memory was faint and indistinct.

Of Easton I would not think—I should have gone mad had I allowed my thoughts to wander toward him. Often, when I lay on my bed, moving to and fro in feverish, broken slumber, which was not rest, his image rose before me palpable and distinct. I would wake with his name on my lips—seeming to feel the clasp of his hand on mine—his kiss warm on my cheek—wake to want and suffering, trying to stifle my cries, and at least die in silence.

At last I grew desperate! Was I not forsaken by every human being? Why should I struggle any longer? Sooner or later I must sink down—down to the lowest depths of misery—if there was any slough darker than I had yet trod. God would not let me die—he had deserted me likewise.

Then holy recollections would come back—my mother's voice would sound in my ear giving me strength again. I would bear up a little longer; I would not take my own life. Wait—wait; only a few days more—it must end then.

All my thoughts centered upon the means of procuring bread, and of retaining possession of my garret. Every week that old crone stood in my doorway, clutching her bony hands and leering at me with her green eyes—that sight was hardest of all to bear.

"Come ag'in," she would say; "now ain't ye glad to see me? I'm your only visitor, except the rats; I guess they come to see you often enough; hope they don't eat up your nice victuals! Oh, them rats, they're wicked critters! Once they nibbled a dead man's face in this very corner; guess they had better livin' than he had had for some time. Do you ever see him? There's several folks left the place 'cause they said he retruded on 'em—he! he!"

I knew how silly it was, but I could not forget her words. When night came on, and the great lean rats began to play about the garret, I had no strength to scare them away. I could hear them nibbling at the dead man's face. I could hear the eagerness with which they feasted upon the little flesh still clinging to his bones.

I did not dread his appearance; I was near enough crazed to become a believer in ghosts, but I so longed for company that I should not have been afraid had he risen and come to sit beside me. Nothing appeared; there was no sound but the pattering tread of the rats that used to look at me with their hungry eyes as if wondering how long before they should feast upon me as they had on the dead man before.

My old frenzy grew stronger. I would rise from my bed in the middle of the night, and go to my window that I might look down the street that led into Paradise Square. I almost thought I could distinguish the house in which old Nan and I had lived, and I laughed again as I thought how the place would soon be once more my home, only then the street must be my resting-place. Well, the flags were not so stony as human hearts—I could die there.

My valuables were gone; my clothing, with the exception of the dress I wore, and that hung about me in rags; I had no bread left; no tidings of the story I had hoped to get money from, and rent-day again at hand.

I begged for two days' grace. I do not know what moved the wretch, but she granted my prayer.

"No more, mind you, not an hour—not a minute! Pay or tramp—the street is broad—there's money to be made! What a fool you must be to set here a-starvin'! Why, I knows them as would dress you up and give you the best goin', for you was a pooty critter when you come here—jest the sort to take, with your red lips and black eyes."

I did not half comprehend her meaning, but enough was plain to make me turn away shuddering. The woman gave her low chuckle again, and went out, saying:

"Now mind, two days, no more! No doubt there'll a great fortin' come to you afore that time—he! he! The angels is very good, I heerd a preacher say once when I was a little gal, and he talked about a God. Wal, mabby there is one, but he don't live in New York if there is."

Two days more and I should be houseless—no shelter but the broad sky—no refuge but the streets. I sat down in blind despair. I did not pray—I had no thought of it! The old woman's words seemed true—there was no Providence in that loathsome place.

With it all, I was very hungry. I had a few crusts left, but I did not dare eat them then, as yet I could exist—they must be reserved for sharper pangs. I was forced to put the moldy crumbs out of sight, they increased my cravings so fiercely.

The first day passed—the night came down. The rats left their hiding-places and played fearlessly about me as I sat on my low stool looking down toward Paradise Square; they glared at me with their sharp eyes as if they were thinking of the banquet they had made upon the dead man, and licked their jaws with their red tongues as if tired of waiting for me to become their prey.

I sat there until the daylight broke. The great city struggled into life. The sunbeams gilded the stately church-tower, where they preached of God, and thanked Him that they were not as other men! I did not move out of my seat or turn my eyes away from Paradise Square.

It was a Sunday morning—a calm, glorious day in midwinter. I heard the church-bells ring solemnly, but the sound came from a distance; there were no temples of worship near. The wretched objects around had no thought of prayer—how should they have had?

The day dragged on. True to her promise, the old woman kept aloof, but the day was almost gone—and then?

A wild voice kept repeating the words in my ears until they sounded like the mocking of a fiend—and then?

The street, the jail, starvation or crime—and then? Hush! The river ran black and deep. I caught the gleam of the waters from my window; under their waters there was rest!

The last black crust was eaten. I could no longer resist the temptation, and my teeth crunched over it with the same sound as in my dreams I had heard the rats tear at the flesh of the dead man.

There was shouting and riot in the street below. There was a ringing of Sabbath bells in the distance, and the strange mingling of sounds surged up to my garret with appalling distinctness.

The daylight faded; lamps began to gleam afar off; a few stars shot into the sky. The wind rose, sweeping through my narrow room, rustling my thin garments, and moaning sadly in my ear.

Hunger had quickened my faculties to terrible acuteness. I heard a heavy step on the stairs several floors below. I knew what was coming then.

Tramp, tramp, up the rotten staircase—through the dark passages. Tramp, tramp, firm, heavy, unrelenting, till it paused before my room. With a crash the door was flung open, and the old crone stood there, excited by drink and evil passions.

"No money, hey? Out with ye—start, don't stop another minute, or I'll fling you out of the window! Cheating a lone woman after this fashion, you lazy animal—start yourself!"

"Give me a little time," I pleaded; "only have mercy."

"Don't talk to me! There ain't three women in the world would do what I have, but you shall go now. Curse you—out into the streets and do as your betters have done before you; steal, murder, turn your pretty face to account; do anything you can, but don't think to cheat honest folks."

I fell on my knees before her; I pleaded by everything that men hold sacred; she did not even understand the words. She seized me by the shoulder and pulled me up; I was powerless in her grasp. She dragged me along the passages and down the stairs, striking and cursing me. The wretched inmates of the house crowded about their doors and laughed at the sight, while she pulled me down—down, opened the outer door, and pushed me into the street. The heavy bolts closed behind me with a crash, the key turned in the lock, and there I stood!

It had come at last; I was houseless, starving—in the street that led to Paradise Square!

The wind blew sharp, as if each blast had been barbed with icicles; a few flakes of snow fell now and then; the sky was cloudless; the moon and stars shone pitilessly. Nowhere could I turn for help; neither earth nor heaven had mercy; men and angels alike stood aloof. My hair streamed out upon my shoulders; my tattered dress fluttered in the wind—eyes and heart were so wild!

There was no fixed purpose in my soul; I was too nearly mad for reflection. Unknowing wherefore, I turned up the dark street, passed into another, and stood in the entrance to Broadway.

Bright and far streamed the luster of a thousand lamps; carriages dashed past; crowds swept by me, none heeding me as they went. I went over and stood upon the other side, passed down a cross-street a little way, and sunk upon the stone steps of the nearest house. How long I sat there I do not know. I felt the wind cutting through my veins, turning my blood to ice. I thought it was the last pang; death must be near me then.

A tall form shrouded in a cloak, left Broadway and turned down that very street. The step was quick and vigorous; I knew it in an instant. It had been long since I had heard that sound; my brain was almost turned with sickness and want, yet I knew it!

He came on—he was close to me—the folds of his cloak brushed my thin garments. I saw the gleam of those eyes which had so often looked lovingly into mine—the face whose lineaments were so lastingly impressed upon my soul.

I could not utter a syllable, but I flung out my arms in mute appeal. The action attracted his attention; he glanced toward me, threw some money on the pavement, and was passing on; I had no words—my throat was husky and dry, my tongue clove to my mouth, but he must not leave me thus. I cried out like one in the agony of death. Again he paused—looked at me—drew near—bent over me—and then, through all the change—he knew my face.

"Great Heaven!" he exclaimed. "Madge, is it you?"

"How came you here?" he cried. "Can't you speak? My God, she is freezing! I will get a carriage, Madge."

He led me to the corner, hailed a carriage that was passing, and when it stopped assisted me in, sprung after me, gave some directions to the driver and away we sped.

He asked me no questions. I could not have answered them; I could only lie back in the seat, feeling life slowly returning, from the warmth of that fur-lined cloak.

We stopped at last; he helped me out and led me up the steps of the house. He opened the door with a latch-key, and hurried me through the hall upstairs. He drew me into a luxurious chamber, brought me wine and bread, and I swallowed them eagerly.

Of the next few days I remember nothing. When I recovered my reason, I was lying in bed, while a woman was watching beside me. For a few mo-

ments I could recollect nothing that had happened, then all came back, and I roused myself with a faint cry for Easton.

I sunk back with a gush of blessed tears. Life was restored to me—not only life but love, and all that could make it worth the having.

The next morning I was able to rise and dress myself without assistance. Nothing had ailed me but hunger and exhaustion. I was quite well again.

I found books in the saloon; I amused myself as best I might, longing only for Easton—neither wondering nor caring where I might be, certain that I was in his charge, and that all was well.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DRIVE.

THAT day and the next I passed alone; but there came two notes from Amory—he would soon be with me.

On the third morning my maid proposed that I should drive out, and I consented. She had prepared a rich carriage-dress in which she attired me. When my toilet was complete, she bade me look in the glass; it was my old self—older, paler, but beautiful still.

We took a long drive, and I leaned back in dreamy content, enjoying the golden sunlight and the keen air, while the woman sat silent and respectful, but watching me curiously all the time. We went far out into the country, and when I returned I felt stronger, more like myself than I had done since I left Woodbrook.

As I descended from the carriage, a boy was standing at the door, with a note in his hand; he held it so that I could read my name upon the address. Thinking it was from Easton, I snatched it from him with a few incoherent words, and hurried into the house.

When the maid attempted to follow me up-stairs, I bade her go back. I went to my room, tore open the note and read:

"MADGE—Easton Amory was married to his cousin Louise the night before he sailed for Europe."

"WALTER STUART."

I stood for a moment dumb and unbelieving; then the events of that evening, Louise's hints, all came back, and a conviction of its reality burst upon me.

"This thing is true," I said, "all true!"

I felt no anger, hardly despair. I was icy cold, my voice firm and low.

"I do not curse him," I said; "God will do that! I do not ask for vengeance—the Father of all will give their due to both the wronger and the wronged! I marvel how I could have been so long deceived."

I took the jewels from my wrists, and laid them on the table, flung off my outer garments, muttering to myself:

"Saved! saved!"

I sat there for hours, reflecting upon those things; many times the maid came to the door, but I ordered her coldly away.

At last a terrible fear seized me—Amory might return and find me there. I started up in a sudden frenzy, opened the door, and without bonnet or shawl fled down the stairs into the passage. The woman who had waited on me was standing there. She uttered a cry of dismay at my approach, and would have detained me, but I pushed her aside, and on I went—again in the street—homeless, friendless!

CHAPTER XVIII.

PARADISE SQUARE AGAIN.

It seemed to me that I was treading the billows of a mighty ocean—around me were clouds and darkness. No stars were in the sky; a mingled storm of rain and sleet fell pitilessly on my bare head, but I heeded not.

On, on, I fled, seeking only to escape from them; whither I went it did not matter, only to be away. I met no one; even the watchmen had deserted their posts, frightened from duty by the awful violence of the storm.

My dress clung tightly about my limbs, my hair fell drenched and loose around my neck, winding in coils around my throat and arms, till their touch was like that of serpents, and I shook them off in sudden horror. I had no idea of my whereabouts; I did not even think, but still fled on, on.

Once I heard a clock strike just overhead, so I knew that I must be under the shadow of a church. I shouted and laughed with the madness which was upon me.

I sat down upon the steps of the church, while spectral figures started up out of the impenetrable darkness and moved about me. There I sat until the frenzy which ruled my soul forced me to go on, aimless and blind, through the storm.

When morning broke, the tempest lulled its fury—there was promise of a beautiful day. I was exhausted, faint, partially crazed, but something told me I was not safe in the fashionable part of the city where I found myself. I sought the close streets, went down the narrow alleys, and wandered on toward Paradise Square. Early as it was loathsome-looking beings were astir, human in nothing. They looked after me and laughed, but nobody tried to detain me. I had sense enough to know that I needed some other covering than my showy dress. I stopped a woman, and bartered one of the rings still left on my fingers, heedless of its cost, for the ragged shawl she wore. The creature's eyes glistened, and, snatching the jewel, she ran off, fearful, I suppose, that I might repent the bargain; and I hurried on, still haunted by the idea that I was pursued, and that there was no safety for me but in new flight.

I was in Paradise Square at last! I found the dwelling where Nan Briggs and I had lived. There

was nothing changed in the neighborhood, except that all looked older and more ruinous.

A tattered, wretched woman passed me, carrying a pail, while a sickly child clung to her, whom she shook off with curses. I recognized her instantly. It was a girl with whom I had often quarreled in the old time. Our destinies had again joined for an instant. She did not remember me, passing on with a stare and a few rude words.

She went her way, and I went where the frenzy led me—it so happened that it took me out of Paradise Square and up an alley into the street where I had lately dwelt.

I reached the house from which I had been turned out a week before—to me it seemed an age since I had last stood there! In the doorway I saw the old woman holding conversation with a man, and in her hand was a letter, into which she was vainly trying to peer.

"I know nothing about her," she was saying, as I approached; "she's left me, and in debt. I wonder what this 'ere is." Before her curiosity could lead her further, I started forward and snatched the letter from her hand, certain that it was for me. "Hoity toity!" she exclaimed, savagely; then perceiving who it was, she burst into a fit of laughter. "There's a purty bird, to be sure! Jest pay me the money you owes me, or I'll pull them velvets off o' ye as sure as you stand here."

I felt that letter brought me new hope, but I was careful not to open it there. The man turned toward me and said something about being paid for his trouble. I drew another ring from my finger.

"Divide this between you," I said, "only let me get back to my garret, for I want rest."

The man and woman bent over the ring together, examining it and me with looks of wonder.

"Sartin, sartin," said the old crone, "go right up-stairs, me dear, you knows the way—it's all nice and comfortable there—go along, purty, go along."

I hurried past her up the tumble-down staircases, till I found myself once more in the little garret—it looked like home. I fastened the door with a stick, piled the table and chair against it, so that I should be roused if it were forced open, and sat down on the bed to read my letter. As I did so a bank-note fell from it and fluttered to the floor. I picked it up—it was a fifty dollar bill.

I felt nothing—was capable of no sensation. I read the note—the story I had written so long before had received that premium. In the midst of my stupor came one thought, one desire—to get out of that great city. I rose and started toward the door, but fell back upon the bed.

I lay there like one excited by opium—I suppose the drugs I had taken so freely during the past week were still powerful in my system. I could neither sleep nor move. There I lay with open eyes, yet beholding the horrible visions which narcotics are wont to call up. Terrible shapes—a long train of ghostly faces, passed in slow procession round the bed, carrying a shroud in which they tried to wrap me. I stood on the brink of precipices, and demon hands would push me over—down—down—into eternity. I was in Paris while the streets ran with blood, and the reign of terror was at its height. Then I was out upon a stormy ocean with only a plank between me and destruction, drifting slowly on, through cold and mist away to a sea of ice. Then for a moment all would fade, and I remembered where I was, sought to rise, but was unable.

Night came on before I was aware. I had no lamp, and there I lay in the darkness. I cannot describe half the terrible sights upon which I was forced to look; only those who have suffered from the improper use of opium can form any idea of my tortures.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE AIMLESS JOURNEY.

WHEN the daylight came I was stronger; probably I fell asleep a little while before morning. It had rained again during the night, and the water lay in a pool in the middle of the chamber, penetrating my thin slippers as I passed.

Then I remembered my desire to get out of that house—out of that city which had become so horrible to me.

I crept from my room and down the stairs without being seen by the old woman. Once more in the open air, I felt a sense of security. The pawnbroker's shop, I had so often visited, was very near; I hurried there at once. The keeper of the place recognized me instantly.

"Come to buy or to sell?" he asked, with a chuckle.

"To buy," I said; "let me see some of the dresses I brought here."

He took down several; I selected one, some underclothing, and a bonnet I had carried to him. I handed him the bill—he looked surprised and suspicious, but made no remark. I did not attempt to count the money he returned me; I could not have done it.

I made him let me go into a little room back to change my clothes, promising him the garments I had on by way of payment.

I dressed myself as neatly as I could, put on the bonnet and a decent shawl, and went away. After I had gone a little distance up the street, I remembered that I left my money in the den where I changed my clothes. I went back immediately, but the Jew laughed my demand to scorn.

"Get out of this!" he cried, "or I'll break every bone in your body! You left no money here, and you know it. Clear out, or I'll have the Charlies on you in no time!"

I did not contend with him; my brain was too much confused entirely to realize my loss.

I went up the street, and found myself again in

Broadway. On I went, turning neither to the right nor the left, quite out of the city into the open country.

I traveled all day, and when night came, entered a barn by the roadside, and, lying down in the hay, slept soundly until morning. I left the place unseen, and continued my journey.

I was conscious of no object that I had in view—had no reason for going on, except to escape, as far as possible, from that great city. I felt neither hunger nor fatigue—nothing but a sensation of relief in the strange quiet that reigned around. There was nothing in my appearance to attract attention, and I went on in perfect security.

I passed several villages, but did not stop in any of them. At last I began to have a burning thirst, and paused at a farm-house to beg a drink of water. The woman kindly gave it to me, asking me if I was hungry. She brought some pieces of bread and meat, and though I had felt no pangs of hunger, the sight of food made me almost ravenous.

She asked me a great many questions, but I answered evasively, and, after resting a little while, went away. She probably thought me some insane person; I was not in the full possession of my senses. I walked more slowly, for my feet began to pain me excessively. I sat down by a brook that was partially frozen, pulled off my shoes and stockings, and bathed my feet in the icy water. I walked all that day, but I do not suppose that I went over twenty miles, although it seemed to me a long distance when I thought of it.

Where I rested that night I do not distinctly remember; I have a faint recollection of falling asleep, waking in the middle of the night almost frozen, and walking on to keep from perishing.

About daylight a farm-wagon overtook me, and the man allowed me to get in and ride. I slept in the straw until he woke me and bade me get out, as he was going no further on that road.

It was then about noon, and the place where he left me a small, straggling village. I looked around, but something warned me not to tarry there, so I hastened through it, passed up the hill, along the river bank, and soon lost sight of the last roof.

It was growing dark when I reached another village, perched on the river bank, like a flock of birds that had tired themselves with a long flight and paused there to rest.

I felt more restless than I had done since my journey began, and spoke aloud, as if addressing some person:

"Am I to rest here?"

But the insane spirit which had guided me so far refused to answer. I went slowly on, trying to collect my thoughts and know where my journey was to end. I was completely worn out, and it was with difficulty I could walk at all. My strength appeared to have left me suddenly; it was the reaction of the fever which had consumed me for days.

I passed beyond the village; there was only a solitary dwelling here and there in sight. The wind grew more cold and piercing, and the snow began to fall heavily. The blast was so powerful that it almost lifted me off my feet, and deprived me of the little strength I had left.

I caught a glimpse of a white house close at hand; the gate blew open as I passed—I took it for a sign—walked through, and went up the winding path which led to the dwelling. As I neared the porch I could see the lights gleaming cheerfully between the closed shutters; but when I tried to mount the steps, my strength failed, and I sunk heavily upon the icy stones.

I heard a bell ring amid the tumult in my brain—heard steps in the hall—the outer door was hastily opened, and a woman's voice reached my ear:

"It sounded like some person falling heavily. Do see what it was, Margaret. God help any poor creature who is houseless this night!"

The hall-lamp sent its flickering rays into the gloom, falling upon me as I lay on the steps, my garments stiff and heavy with snow.

For an instant they did not discover me; some one stepped on the porch—there was an exclamation of horror—the same voice cried out:

"She's dead! Oh, Margaret! Margaret!"

Kind hands raised me; they bore me through the hall into a lighted room and laid me on a sofa. I was not insensible, but I could not frame a syllable, and lay passive while my clothing was removed, other garments put upon me, a warm drink held to my lips, which I was unable to swallow. After that I remember nothing, except that the same woman's voice called out:

"She is fainting! Oh, my God, it is death!"

Then a great darkness gathered about me, faces and voices faded in the distance, and I drifted off through the thick gloom, trying in vain to stretch out my hands and beseech them to save me from the troubled waters down which I slowly floated to the deeper blackness beyond.

CHAPTER XX.

NEW LIFE.

FOR weeks life was a blank. I remember nothing; the days came and went, but each successive one found me senseless, helpless as before.

The first thing I recollect is opening my eyes in a large, pleasant chamber, carefully darkened to a twilight that suited my feeble vision. I was lying upon a bed, the curtains thrown back, so that I had a view of the room so far as the shadows would permit. I tried to think, to remember where I was; but there was a pressure on my head as if a cold hand had been laid there, and I knew nothing more.

It must have been another day when I again came to myself. I was too weak to move, but my head was free from pain. I saw a lady sitting by the bed; she was leaning over me with gentle solicitude,

and when my eyes met hers in eager questioning, she smiled, and answered as if I had uttered the inquiries which struggled in my enfeebled brain.

"You are safe and in good hands. You have been sick, but you are better. Try to understand me and go to sleep."

She gave me something to drink, and I sunk into a quiet slumber.

That lady whom I had first seen was constantly with me, always kind and attentive; and there was something in the sound of her voice, the touch of her cool hand, which was inexpressibly grateful and soothing to me.

A fortnight after, I was able to sit up and converse a little, though I was still too weak to walk more than a few steps, and was carefully supported from my bed to the easy-chair in which it pleased me to recline.

One day, after having been assisted to rise, I lifted my hand to my head—my hair had been cut quite short.

"It will grow again," my kind nurse said in answer to my look of wonder; "the doctor ordered it to be done, much against my will, I assure you, for it was very beautiful."

"How came I here?" I asked, for the first time feeling able to think and ask questions.

"We found you lying on the porch," she replied. "Probably you had intended to come in, but your strength failed."

"I remember," I interrupted; "I remember!"

Everything came back to me then—my wanderings in the streets of the city—my flight—the long journey and the last terrible pang with which consciousness had gone from me.

"Where were you going?" she asked, gently.

"Going?" I repeated, "going? Nowhere. I had nowhere to go."

"Were you in search of some friend?"

"I have no friends," I answered; "no friends and no home."

"I saw the tears start to her eyes, but she repressed them, as if fearful of agitating me."

"God provides for the fatherless," she whispered; "trust yourself to Him, he will never forsake you."

I had not heard such language for a long, long time—not since Mr. Thornton died!

I whispered a request that she would read to me from the Bible, and she at once complied. I think I never heard a more pleasing reader. Her voice was exquisitely modulated, so soft and clear.

I listened in silence, only motioning her to proceed when she paused to see if I was tired, and drinking such strength and consolation from the blessed words she read as I had never before received.

At length she laid the book down and said:

"You must not listen any more to-day, my child; go to bed now and sleep awhile."

"Will you read to me to-morrow?" I asked.

"Yes, to-morrow. You will get strong now every day."

"I shall soon be well?" I said, inquiringly.

"Very soon, I trust."

"I am sorry. I thought God would have let me die."

"We must be resigned to His will," she answered. "Remember the sweet promises I have just read to you, and be certain that 'He doeth all things well.'"

"I have waited so long," I said, rather to myself than her; "is there never to be rest for me, never?"

"You will find it here," she said, and her voice soothed the trouble that had surged over my soul of the blackness of the past; "sleep, my child, be at peace."

I fell asleep with her hand clasped in mine—her dear voice murmuring a prayer that went with me into my slumber and blessed it.

So the days passed. She asked me no questions; I saw no one but her, an old servant, and the physician who visited me daily.

At last I was able to go down-stairs with their assistance, and be taken into the pleasant parlor. It was a beautiful morning in early spring; the trees were putting out their leaves. A flock of robins were singing and calling from the maple branches in the yard, and the sunlight stole brightly in at the window, playing about me and warming my poor heart into new life. For the first time I asked how long I had been ill. The lady told me two months!

"And you have watched over me," I said—"you have cared for me as a mother would have done. I did not know that Heaven had left such an angel on earth!"

"I have only done my duty," she replied. "I am repaid in seeing you well again." I leaned back in my chair with a gush of grateful tears. "Do not cry," she said; "see how bright the sun shines; how everything speaks of peace."

"I want to cry," I answered; "it does me good."

She drew my head upon her shoulder, and, nestled against her heart, I wept myself into composure. "May I ask you a few questions?" she asked, when I was once more able to talk.

"Anything you please," I said; "I have nothing to conceal from you—nothing."

"The greater portion of your history is known to me," she continued; "you revealed it in your delirium, living over the painful scenes of your life, calling upon those who should have befriended you; so you can have very little to tell me."

"Did I mention any names?" I asked.

"No one heard them but myself," she replied, "and all that I know will be sacredly kept. Your last name I never could catch—you almost always called yourself 'poor Madge, poor little Madge.'"

"My name is Madge," I said, "Madge Wyld—a strange name they used to say, but no stranger than my life has been."

"Let it now begin anew," was her answer; "date another existence from this sickness, and forget the old one."

"How shall I begin?" I questioned, and the trouble came upon my soul again. "I do not know how or what to do—I was so strong and brave once, but strength and courage have forsaken me."

"God will show you the way," she said.

"Yes, I will trust in him," I answered, fervently. "I have trusted in man too long."

"You are very young, yet—there is a long life before you. Let us hope that your struggles are over."

"Oh, I cannot bear any more," I exclaimed.

"God will not ask me to suffer any longer. This must be a new life that I take up now, or I had better have died with the fever."

"It will be a new one, my child, sanctified by the memory of old troubles, by the courage with which you bore them—by the noble, womanly nature that aided you in the darkest hour."

"I have no friends," I said; "no one to whom I can turn. When I leave your roof I am all alone again in the cruel, pitiless world."

"I will be your friend; and, trust me, I will never forsake you."

"You," I said. "You will add to the kindness you have shown me—you are not tired—you are willing to do more?"

"Your own mother could not feel more kindly toward you than I do, Madge. I have promised to be your friend, and during my whole life no one can say that I have ever broken a pledge."

"How shall I repay you?" I sobbed. "Tell me how."

"By doing your duty—striving to be happy, and making the best use of the means placed in your reach."

"I must have work to do," I said, eagerly. "I cannot be idle. I shall soon be strong enough—let me go to work."

"You shall—you shall!"

"I can teach many things. I have had classes in drawing; I can write. I am willing to do anything—anything, only to be at work."

"You will find that close at hand," she said. "We have a large school in our village; they are now in want of a teacher. If you prove yourself capable, I can procure a drawing-class there, and you will earn enough to make you independent and tranquil."

"And I can live in this quiet village—find rest and peace here!"

"I trust so—I am certain of it. But you must not think of work yet; you must keep yourself calm and get strong as fast as possible. That is all you have to do at present."

"God bless you!" I said, sobbing on her breast my gratitude and my tears. "But I must not stay here; I shall never be able to repay you for what you have already done."

She clasped me to her bosom and talked to me for a long, long time, and when our conversation ceased, we understood each other well.

"I have no daughter, Madge," she said; "live with me—be my child!"

I had no words to speak my feelings, but she comprehended my every thought. Mutely my arms encircled her waist, and her kiss upon my forehead sealed the bond.

"Now be at rest," she said, and I was so.

CHAPTER XXI.

AWAKENING POWERS.

TIME passed on and I grew stronger, happier, more content than I had been in all my life before.

Mrs. Chester appeared to me hardly human. I used to marvel heaven had not claimed her long before.

She was still a very lovely woman, and almost youthful looking, though she had approached middle age. There was the seal of a great sorrow upon the pale, beautiful face, but its bitterness had passed, leaving a holy calm. There was a peculiar charm in her every movement—kindness, gentleness, all womanly emotions and sympathies in her look, and my poor, trampled heart turned toward her with an outpouring of affection, such as I remembered to have felt for my mother years and years before. In a few weeks I was sufficiently recovered to walk in the open air, to sit dreamily in the warm sunlight, to read, and even employ my pencil.

There were several lovely views from the house itself, which I sketched; and I made copies of pictures from memory, which Mrs. Chester showed to the principal of the school, and those, with her influence, procured me the situation I desired, at a salary far beyond what I had ventured to hope.

I put my past life resolutely aside, and when memories from its darkness would intrude, they had lost their power to pain.

The love which I had felt for Easton Amory was gone wholly out of my soul. I had not even hatred or contempt for him—no recollection connected with that wild dream had power to trouble me. I could only thank God for having preserved me in my hour of temptation and peril.

My school duties occupied me during several hours of each day, to my great content. I did my best, and was glad to know that both employers and pupils were satisfied. I made friends. Life blossomed into beauty around me. All my life before I had been an outcast, an alien—here I was loved and respected.

My home was with Mrs. Chester—after that first conversation it never occurred to either that I could have another. Peace and rest came to my heart, and with their dawning the powers of my mind woke to a strength and vigor they had never before possessed.

I wrote a great deal; and after a time my produc-

tions gained that force which only practice can give. Mrs. Chester sent a number of articles, both prose and verse, to leading magazines, and before I could realize it, I was a constant contributor to their pages, rapidly gaining favor and emolument.

At last I began a novel. I did not even confide my secret to Mrs. Chester. I felt timid to approach the subject.

I recollect so well the day upon which it was commenced. The thought had been in my mind for weeks and weeks—the plot had worked itself out—the characters stood clearly before me. I stopped writing for some time—that pleasant dream was so palpable that I could put pen to nothing else.

I was sitting with Mrs. Chester in the library that day—she had been reading to me, but I had heard nothing except the melody of her voice, which blended itself pleasantly with my dream. At last the power upon me would be no longer controlled. I left the apartment without a word—I could not break the spell—went up to my chamber and began to write.

I labored from midday until dusk, and then a tap at the door aroused me. I rose, laid down my pen and put away the scattered sheets, weary physically, but with an acuteness and activity of mind I had never felt.

Mrs. Chester entered softly, and bent over me.

"You naughty Madge," she said; "come down immediately."

I obeyed her at once, but I felt as if dreaming still.

"You have had no dinner," she said, laughing; "did you know it? I saw you were inspired when you went out of the library. But what have you been doing? Really, you look quite dazed—what revelation have you had?"

"I will tell you in a fortnight," I replied; "let me have my own way till then."

Mrs. Chester complied at once, and never, during the interval, did she evince the slightest curiosity. I was left to myself, walking about, dreaming at will, and working with heart, and soul, and hand.

When the time had expired, I went down to her one evening, with as much of the manuscript as I had been able to complete. I read it to her, made the story plain, and then asked her if it should be finished.

I remember so well the look she gave me, so full of love, but she only said:

"My child, you have a great gift bestowed upon you; be sure that you employ it aright."

After that I read to her every evening what I had written; we discussed every separate chapter and scene, and from her judicious criticisms I received wonderful benefits.

I worked faithfully, and with my whole soul in the task. There was a long vacation in the school, and the pleasant summer was a season of freedom.

Mrs. Chester took good care of me; she insisted upon my writing only a certain number of hours each day; she made me take long walks and drives, and put every thing like work or strong mental effort aside when I left my desk.

I was well, happier than I had ever been—happy in the consciousness that my dreams were no longer aimless—that I had made them my subjects instead of submitting to their tyranny.

At times, in spite of all, there was a void in my heart, an emptiness—no craving for that poor love which had died out—but a pang at my own blindness, and regret for much that I had flung heedlessly from me.

I talked freely with Mrs. Chester; more and more I recalled Walter Stuart's goodness, his purity of character, and the host of noble qualities I had once overlooked. I could see them all now, could contrast them quietly with the passion, impulsiveness, and reckless character which had left Easton Amory a bad, degraded man, and reproached myself for my own blindness and folly.

Mrs. Chester was a patient, attentive listener; and after one of those confidences I rose up calmed again by her sweet counsels and tender sympathy.

When October came with its purple skies, its gorgeous woods, its soothing holy influences, my book was finished. I laid down my pen for the last time with a sigh, and the sorrowful feeling with which one would part from a dear friend. I had lived so long among the creations or my own fancy that I could not bear to see them fade from me, and know that they would never be mine again.

I had bent my whole mind to my work; I had written and rewritten, considered every incident and page. I had tried to make a good book—one from which those who read would rise up benefited and strengthened. I knew that the writing of it left me a better woman. I have it not on my soul that I wrote a line or a word which, on my death-bed, could rise to haunt me with the wrong it had done.

Mrs. Chester took the manuscript from me, saying only that I had no further concern in the matter—it was her child now, and to be dealt with as she saw fit.

I asked no questions; I thought little about it after the first few days of missing its companionship; I was languid and indisposed to mental exertion, as continued labor is sure to leave one—I only wanted to be quiet.

Meantime, life passed pleasantly. My duties in the school commenced anew; I read, walked, sailed on the beautiful river, growing each day calmer and more at rest.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOPE AND FAME.

THE autumn glided on toward winter, and there had been no talk of my novel between us. Mrs. Chester would not allow me to read either newspa-

pers or magazines, but she managed so well that I really had no thought of her reason.

She never told me the book had been placed in the hands of a publisher, and I had ceased almost to think about it—any writer will understand that feeling.

At length, one day, I was in the library, lying on the sofa, and very happy in my idleness, when Mrs. Chester entered, looking flushed and excited, and happier than I had ever seen her.

Without any explanation, she placed a pile of newspapers and reviews in my hands, pointing out particular paragraphs, saying:

"Read those, Madge."

I did read them—read in a sort of dream notices of my book so full of praise that I could not believe it real.

"It can not be," I said; "I don't understand it at all."

Reader, I was famous!

But those kind arms were about my neck, that dear voice was murmuring praises in my ear sweeter than any the world could give.

"I am so bewildered," I said; "I must be dreaming."

"Not at all—it is true, Madge! Oh, my darling, you have been sorely tried, but the future shall make amends—it spreads broad and clear before you—thank God and be satisfied."

After a time we were both calmer, and then I asked her to explain every thing to me, for it looked so mysterious and incomprehensible.

"And the book is published!—but we have never seen even the proof-sheets."

She took a volume from the table and handed it to me—it was my own novel.

"I read the proofs," she said, laughingly, "and consider myself a blue-stocking on the strength of it. I was determined to astonish you, and I flatter myself that I have succeeded."

"Indeed, you have—but please explain the whole affair to me."

"This was the way of it, illustrious lady! I sent the manuscript to a publisher of great influence whom I had once known—he was acquainted with your name from your magazine articles. The book charmed him—he accepted it at once, and on the most liberal terms. It is creating the utmost interest, and is the great success of the season. I have kept every thing from you until now, but as your name is in everybody else's mouth, you ought to know your worth."

She was radiant with happiness. Had I been her own child she could not have rejoiced more sincerely.

"You are making not only fame, but money," she said, smiling; "the editions are selling like wildfire, and you will be an heiress after all."

So we fell to wondering and marveling that it should have so befallen—at least I did, but she said:

"You are only a child in spite of all you have suffered, my pretty Madge."

"I believe I always shall be," I replied.

"I hope so," she said, earnestly; "yes, always a child, but a child-woman."

"If I were more like you!"

"Suffering affects us differently; it would never have made you like me. Madge, you have a great gift committed to your charge. I am only an humble servant of His will."

"You are my preserver, my guardian angel! But for you, where should I be? Mrs. Amory was kind to me, my friend, but you have taught me to live for something beyond the hour—to make my life of use; after all, the book is more yours than mine."

"My dear," she said, playfully, "I claim only the glory of having corrected the proofs. I defy anybody to point out an error."

"It was fortunate that my crabbed writing was not trusted wholly to the discretion of the printers. I certainly am much obliged to you."

"Please to show it by putting on your bonnet and going with me to walk—you have been sitting in the house too long."

"I believe you consider fresh air a remedy for 'every ill that flesh is heir to.'"

"I certainly think it an excellent preventive. Look at yourself; how much healthier you are in body and mind when you take regular daily exercise—cheerful, hopeful and happy."

"It is your presence, your care, that makes me so," I answered. "Oh, my dear friend, I am the work of your hands. You have taught me, lifted me up, brought out the powers of my mind—made me all that I am or ever shall be."

"With God's help," she whispered; "think what poor creatures we should be without that."

So we were grateful for the good that had come upon me and received it prayerfully.

Already I could see that my past sufferings had all worked to my benefit; they had given me a knowledge of life; taught me deeper insight into the human heart, and helped to prepare me for the profession which I had taken upon myself—one that I revered and strove to honor always.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HAPPINESS AT LAST.

WHEN winter appeared close at hand, it suddenly stayed its progress, and a troop of beautiful Indian-summer days descended upon our mountain home.

The skies wore their most transcendent hues—the air was mild and calm—everything spoke of peace; but there came upon me a sadness which a season like that will always bring, only it was deeper than it will ever be again.

I was bowed beneath a vague, unsettled sorrow which nothing could dispel, but no one chid me for it.

I think it was neither weak nor wicked. As much as was possible, I restrained my feelings, but I could not always prevent the gust of emotion which would sweep over my soul. There was no bitterness in it—not much of vain regret; but a strange longing, an unsatisfied yearning, a great aspiration which begged for comfort, and I had none to offer.

One day, Mrs. Chester had gone out upon some business, and I was alone for many hours. I felt very solitary, full of unrest. I sung low, mournful songs for a time, but grew weary of that, and, pushing away my guitar, as I had done books and papers before, allowed myself to fall into a long, dreary reverie, such as I had come often to indulge in of late.

The tears were still wet upon my cheeks, though I could not have told why I wept, and blaming my own folly, I broke from the crowd of sorrowful thoughts that haunted me like a host of repining spirits, making me a companion in their suffering.

A volume of engravings lay upon the table, and I took it up, turning to a face that always possessed a peculiar charm for me—it reminded me of Walter Stuart.

It seemed more like him than ever before. There were the same truthful eyes—the same sunny wave to the brown hair, the mouth so firm yet sweet, wearing the look of a man who knew no deceit. It was a face that a stranger might have trusted; the wretched would have turned to it for consolation; a grieved child would have known instinctively that there he should find sympathy.

My thoughts went back to the childish days at Woodbrook—to our last terrible parting. I found his character always consistent—always upright and decided, yet gentle and tender as the nature of woman.

I remembered the peculiar sweetness my name always had when uttered by his lips, the misty softness of his eyes when he pronounced it, and it was with a heavy sigh that I laid the volume aside, confessing to myself that I was wiser now, and that were the threads of my destiny again to be placed in my hands, I would fling them forth far differently from the course they had taken of old.

"Walter," I involuntarily said aloud, "Walter, I was blinded by a frenzy—could I see you now I might at least beg to be forgiven for my waywardness and cruelty."

"See how your wish is answered," said the sweet voice of my only friend, speaking suddenly.

At her words I looked up—she glided away like a spirit of light, and in her place was he for whom my soul had called—Walter Stuart was standing by my side.

A long hour after, the door opened softly, and Mrs. Chester stood there smiling down upon us. How that time had passed I cannot tell. I know that to me it was as if heaven had suddenly opened and dazzled my eyes with its glory.

"My children," she said, moving toward us, "be content! The clouds have passed—lo, the new morning! Will you accept me as your mother, Madge?"

Walter Stuart drew me gently to her feet; we knelt there together, and she pressed her silent kiss upon the forehead of each. I was startled—I looked wonderingly from one to the other.

"I do not understand," I said; "what is this mystery?"

"One that is easily explained," she said. "When your delirium revealed to me who you were, I recognized the girl who had been Walter's hope and dream for years. The physician forbade my allowing you to know any fact that could agitate you, and I kept my secret a little longer than was necessary. Madge, I am Walter's mother—will it be a new bond between us?"

I know my arms were about her neck, my kisses on her cheek, but what I said cannot be told. She pushed me gently away.

"Walter looks jealous—go back to him."

I crept to the shelter of his arms again, feeling that henceforth there was a resting place for my poor heart.

When we had all grown more composed, I learned everything that had been unknown to me.

When Walter Stuart saved me from that bad man, he had been on the eve of starting South upon business which could not be deferred. He was forced, after a day's search, to leave me for a time, writing to his mother to come at once to New York and spare no efforts to find me.

Before she could comply with his letter, I had found my way to her house—the rest is simple enough. Business had detained Stuart; besides, his mother had written him that on all accounts it was better he should remain where he was for a season.

I made few acquaintances in the village. Mrs. Chester was a stranger there, Walter entirely unknown, and never having heard the name of her second husband, it was, of course, natural enough that no revelation of the tie between herself and Stuart should have reached me.

"Now you understand it all, Madge," Walter said, when the story was concluded.

I looked into his face, pale with the emotions which rushed over me as I thought of the storms I had battled, the shipwreck I had escaped. He read my thoughts as he had always done—drew me to his heart and said:

"It is over, Madge, forgotten; my own beautiful, gifted wife!"

"Come to me, my children," whispered our mother, and again we knelt at her feet, and when she pressed a parent's kiss upon each forehead, we heard the murmur of her voice in blessing, and felt the flow of her tears in holy thanksgiving.

THE END.

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